

Purdue North Central Library



3 3350 001 931 450



PS
501
P67x
2010

Portals

2010

PURDUE
UNIVERSITY
NORTH CENTRAL

The publication of thirty-eighth volume of *Portals* would not be possible without the generous support of Chancellor Dworkin, the Department of English and Modern Languages, and the indefatigable judges: Barbara Austin, John Cates, Carol Connelly, Heather Engstrom, Heather Fielding, Paul Hecht, Jerry Holt, Judy Jacobi, K.R. Johnson, Diane Jortner, Amanda Laudig, John Manning, Jane Rose, Beth Rudnick, Corey Schumacher, Kristi Thomas, and Sarah White.

Table of Contents

Preface

Creative Nonfiction

Some Fought for Each Other <i>Mark Strudas</i>	2
---	---

Waiting <i>Tom Potter</i>	7
------------------------------	---

The Super Bowl <i>Ethan Davis</i>	9
--------------------------------------	---

Academic Essays

A Study of Single-Gender Classrooms <i>Dan Fortney</i>	14
---	----

Unsure of Uniforms: Are Assumed Effects Merely Hearsay? <i>Jennifer Evan</i>	23
--	----

The Great Debate: The Pros and Cons of Guns in the Classroom <i>Robert Braddy</i>	33
---	----

Aspartame in the Membrane <i>Lakiska Flippin</i>	42
---	----

Alzheimer's Disease in Society: Research Efforts Investigate a Cure Through Immunotherapy <i>Jennifer Evan</i>	48
---	----

Poetry

Twilight's Last Burn <i>Amadeo Madrid</i>	58
--	----

Ad Infinitum <i>Karen Thompson</i>	59
---------------------------------------	----

Blossom <i>Karen Thompson</i>	60
----------------------------------	----

Fiction	
Roll Call	63
<i>Jonathon Meyers</i>	
A Touch of Time	66
<i>Deeb Browne</i>	
Crispix and Glasses	72
<i>David Mak</i>	
Contributors	78
Cover	
My Home	
<i>Cynthia de Santiago</i>	

Creative Non-Fiction

Mark Strudas

Tom Potter

Ethan Davis

PS
501
P67X
2010

Some Fought for Each Other

I've been sitting here for what feels like an eternity. My head is throbbing from the incessant scream of the jet engines combined with the tremendously uncomfortable seating arrangements. All twenty-eight of us passengers are crammed in the chopper meant to hold twenty-four. My fellow Marines and I are sitting face-to-face, side-by-side, on bench-type seats made with red, seatbelt-type straps crossed over each other and bound to the aluminum framework. The Marines in front of me are so close that our legs are interweaving. I sat impatiently and stared out of the back of the helicopter into the night. The noise, along with the excitement of finally arriving at our place of duty, made it virtually impossible for me to fall asleep. I thought a lot about what we were doing here and about how proud I was to be in the United States Marine Corps.

I joined the Marine Corps in the midst of a Bush-friendly era. 9/11 was still fresh on everyone's mind and we, as a country, were red hot and out for blood. It was a time when we were proud to show the nation's resolve and the brute strength of our unwavering military. Ever since I was little, I wanted to be an "army guy." The idea of serving my country, wearing the uniform, and being looked at as a hero was appealing to me. Now, with a nation pushed back on its heels and many other people stepping forward as heroes, I had the opportunity. Our arrival in Iraq meant that my journey through the Marines was about to reach its pinnacle. I would be one step closer to people telling me that I'm a hero, or at least remembering me as one.

Finally, I stepped off of the helicopter, into the darkness, and that's when I knew that I wasn't in Kansas anymore. I was greeted with a deafening hum, and I was blasted with seventy mile per hour winds. Immediately, I could feel snot running from every orifice in my head as it was quickly replaced with carbon monoxide from the 53's exhaust. Almost immediately, I heard a barely audible, "Strudas, let's go!" as if someone were yelling at me from behind a hundred closed doors, or with their head buried in a pillow. Sooner than I could recognize who cried out my name or the foul taste of sulfur and powdery sand that filled the air, someone grabbed me by the strap of my MOLLE pack, pulled me as if I were a ragdoll, and threw me to another Marine. This young "Devil Dog" I recognized immediately. It was Matt.

Matt Langlois was my roommate in French Creek on Camp

Lejeune. He left on one of the advanced flights into Iraq to train with the platoon that my platoon would be replacing there. He was a handsome young man with a quick wit and a contagious smile. His hair was obviously a golden brown military fade that topped a face full of faint freckles and oversized teeth. In the short time that we had known each other, he had already gone far out of his way to be a good friend to me. I was really happy to see him. Matt had a look of nerve-wracking excitement on his face as he led me toward the hangar, his clammy hand draped over the back of my neck.

As we were walking, I could hear random faint thumps in the distance and almost feel their arrhythmic concussion in my chest. Matt stopped me as we neared the hangar, pushed the cumbersome mass of gear strapped to my back so that the weight would force me to do an about face, and then pointed into the distance. What I saw next was the most paralyzing fireworks show that I had ever seen. The only problem was that the pyrotechnics were not scripted. This was most definitely not a Disneyland-type attraction. The sinister sky was not filled with neon red, white, and blue. It was most definitely not painted with shapes like flowers and spirals and hearts. Red was the predominant color. Never white. Never blue.

Between the darkness and the near blinding flashes, a flood of dirty smoke could be seen blanketing the red night sky and shattering any star's dream of shedding light on our new temporary home. Those sporadic concussions were no longer a mystery but a menace beating me on the chest from the inside-out, reminding me that I am not here to make friends, but to accomplish a mission. The thought of sleeping that night was almost laughable; however, it was an absolute must. If I wanted to smother at least part of the agony that was a twelve hour, 140 degree day, a couple hours of shut-eye would come in handy.

There was a red sky in the morning. The smoke and pollution from the burning plastic, trash, and ammunition were as evident after daybreak as they were when I had first witnessed the firestorm. Only minutes prior to my arrival at Al Taqaddum airbase (TQ), an Iraqi militant took a chance and fired a rocket (or mortar, we'll never know) out of a homemade tube from the bottom of the sixty four square mile plateau that was TQ. He managed to hit our ammo supply point. Lucky shot. Generally, the Iraqis don't know if they will hit anything of importance;

somewhere on our base. This was called “code red,” indirect fire, or incoming. The attacks on our base were frequent and happened like clockwork.

At the beginning of my first seven month tour, the indirect fire was a cause for concern. We would all don our Kevlar helmets and FLAK jackets, and run out of our leaky, kerosene-soaked canvas tents and into the sandy concrete hangar where we worked. The Lieutenant would get accountability of everyone in the platoon and call our numbers in to the Regiment. We would wait an hour or so for the “all clear” and then head back to work or go back to sleep. The Iraqi militants were so frequent and unsuccessful with their attempts, we became desensitized to the whole situation. After a while, if we were sleeping and heard incoming rounds, my fellow Marines and I would drape our FLAK jackets over our bodies, like ballistic blankets, fall asleep again, and wait for another Marine from our platoon to come and give us the “all clear.” Only part of our lackadaisical response due was to the predictability and the inaccuracy of these futile attempts. Sleep in TQ is hard to come by.

Each half of our platoon shared twelve hour shifts. If you were lucky enough to sleep during the night when a “code red” mostly occurred, the sunshine was waiting just around the corner to melt the tarmac and heat everything around it to roughly one-hundred-seventy degrees by the time you showed up for work. There was a breeze, but it was most definitely not welcome. That, too, was heated like a blow dryer full of powdery sand and flies. The air was so dry that the moisture in your sweat was evaporated before it reached the surface of your skin. In order to prevent heat stroke, we were taught to lick the skin on the back of our hands, or forearms, because you could taste the crusty remnants of salt. Many times, people who worked on the base would collapse from heat stroke or heat exhaustion before they even knew that they were dehydrated.

If you were one of the unfortunate fools who were “volun-told” that you would be working nights, it was worse. In the summer, inside of the tents where we slept, the heat was comparable to standing on the blacktop. Each filthy canvas tent slept a dozen exhausted Marines in bunk beds which, at most, were three feet away from each other. Many of the bunk beds were pushed side-by-side with a poncho draped between them in order to give the “Leathernecks” on each side more room to dress or relax when they are not sleeping. We spent a lot of time

reading and rereading mail and holiday cards sent from home. During each holiday that we spent overseas, each member of our platoon would hang the Thanksgiving hand-turkeys or red Valentine's Day hearts that he received, in an attempt to forget about being away from home. I suppose it helped a little, but it wasn't quite like the real thing. We would proudly pass around pictures of our family and gloat about how great they are. There was enough moisture inside the tents from sweat, during the summer months, to give each "Devil Dog" his own pool of perspiration at the foot of their bed to wade in. There was enough rain, in the bitter cold winter months, to soak our mattresses completely and leave an ocean of water everywhere. Physical, mental, and emotional misery were all doled out to us, in uniquely horrifying ways, every day for the next seven months.

I think some people believe that Marines, Sailors, Soldiers, Airmen, etc. carry out our missions because we are mindless drones who cannot think for ourselves, or we wholeheartedly believe in the reasons that our American forces are occupying Iraq. Part of that emotional and mental anguish we endured came from literally screaming, until our eyes were bloodshot red, at the television when Bush was re-elected. Many times it came from within, in the form of conversation with other Marines, trying to reason with each other as to why the United States is in Iraq in the first place.

When I joined the Marine Corps, I admit, yes, I was roped in by the propaganda of 9/11 and weapons of mass destruction. Yes, I am guilty. I felt the insatiable need to stand alongside my brothers, kick down doors, and seek revenge for what was taken from us that day. However, before my first deployment to Iraq, I became a little bit more familiar with the facade that was Bush's political propaganda. The sheet was no longer pulled over my eyes, but the fact that I would soon be departing to a third world country was still very real. Instead of our political mission, I realized that my efforts needed to be focused on the well-being of my fellow Marines and other Marines that I didn't even know. Airmen. Sailors. Soldiers. Civilians who were seeking refuge. Guys like Matt Langlois. I didn't mention him because he played an essential role in my story, I mentioned him because he has a name. He has a face. He has a wife, Missy, and would soon (a year in the future) have a child on the way, named Andrew. Many real people went into that hellhole together to defeat an uncommon enemy, and to obtain uncommon goals. Some fought for freedom. Some fought for revenge.

Some fought for each other. They all had families and friends who wanted them home just as bad, if not worse, than mine did. Why should I be so selfish as to lay back and watch my brothers die? Because I don't believe in the American political agenda? They don't either.

Waiting

The smell of human waste and cleaning supplies is always pungent in this painfully dull atmosphere, where it seems there are no surprises to the people who walk these halls. All of the people in it have the same look on their faces, as if they don't really know what kind of expression to put on. I guarantee it's never a comforting expression, unless you're the one who is being lied to. But I'll just have to wait in the room with all the other discontented, frightened people, sitting and pretending to watch the television while their minds wander off to terrible corners. One can't even find a comfortable chair to sit in this room, or maybe the chairs are plenty comfortable and we just find ourselves too discomforted or too anxious to allow ourselves the comfort. Considering the reasons for being there, I wouldn't doubt this theory. After all, there is no comfort in the waiting room.

I find myself in this room for the third time this year, a number that's impossible to forget. It's always the same terrified, anxious, sick feeling that you just can't get out of you, and each minute seems like an eternity, a neverending torture scene where one can never predict the outcome. I just sit there, either looking at the floor or the television, and every once in a while I scan across the room, observing everyone else stuck in this lonely room. It's not that the room itself is lonely as in nobody is there to occupy it. It's the sense of loneliness that you have no one there to comfort you. The other fifteen people in the room are merely strangers who are thrown into the same godawful situation you are. I try to watch the television, usually the news, to distract me or perhaps help time pass by a little bit quicker. The television is there, after all, to comfort us, as if we were sitting in our own living rooms. It never is being watched, though; the television just sits there and comforts itself. It's a useless act, simply just wishful thinking. Then again, everything is wishful thinking in the waiting room.

This visit, there are two children in the waiting room, with too very somber, sick-looking parents. The children are the only two people in the room with the courage to talk and break the deep silence. Watching them play, I scan the room and notice a few smiles on people's faces. I smile too, not because I think they're cute or entertaining, but because I envy their innocence and unknowing of why they are there. At this moment, I wish I was four-years old again and didn't have a care in the world. All I'd have to worry about is whether or not

mom or dad were there to comfort me when I get hurt, or feed me when I get hungry, or read me a story before bed. Unfortunately, I'm not four-years old and I flash back to the realization of why I'm here in the waiting room.

I look at the clock again but don't really take note of the time. Looking at the clock just makes time feel as though it's going by even slower, so I try to distract myself from the act, but it's impossible when one is in such a distraught state, especially since time is everything when you're helpless, sitting in this room. Nearly every time I scan the room I notice at least one person checking the clock. It's almost as though the clock is a God, the way we look at it and abide by its power. It tells us what time it is, and time runs our life. In my case, I have the misfortune of not knowing how much time I must allow to pass by in the waiting room.

As I continue to sit and wonder, I become more impatient, more discontent and discomforted. I have the most anxious feeling swelling up inside of me, like a balloon about to burst. As I think of the terrible possibilities that are to come, I feel myself approaching an edge--an edge of breaking down, where I feel my eyes begin to slightly fill with tears, but I dare not let enough to build up to allow a single tear to run down my face. Not in this place, where I'm unaware of what is yet to come. These tears will come later, either from a state of happiness or a severe state of shock and sadness. I very much fear the latter at this moment, where sadness is infinite in the waiting room.

I stare down at the ground for a few seconds to pull myself back together, remembering that my previous visits here turned out to produce tears of relief, for after bottling up all your emotions in this room, tears are coming whether the news be good or bad. Such a resilient person that I'm here for, never was able to go down and out. Even in old age, still a positive person that won't succumb to age restrictions. Someone who never seems they'll be able to leave this earth, even after facing so many tragedies and having to experience so many griefs in her life. Someone who will always be in my memory as one of the most important figures to ever be in my life. Someone who has shaped the way I am and would always be proud of me and there to comfort me in my time of need. If only she was in this room with me now, and not in her own dark, cold room. But, I am indeed alone, and it will remain this way until a nurse or doctor decides to come and update me on this situation. Until then, I'll just have to wait, as time will only tell how much longer I have to be in the waiting room.

The Super Bowl

“Drop ‘em guys,” I said quietly to my teammates, “drop your buzzers. It’s over.”

Steve and Peter stared at me blankly then glanced at the scoreboard and smiled to themselves. CLANK went the buzzers as the three of us let them slip from our hands and fall to the table below. Smugly, we stared over at our opponents’ seemingly heartbroken faces because they too had taken a look at the board and realized the same thing my companions and I had. We had won. We had won it all. The crowd applauded as we took our bows and walked off the stage where history had just been made. All of our hard work and schooling up to this point had finally paid off, and it felt good to be champions.

None of us could have seen this coming two weeks earlier as winter faded and spring began in my junior year at Michigan City High School. Basketball, swimming, and wrestling were over and it was time for what we were all waiting for: not baseball season, not track season, not even girls’ tennis season; it was time for the real competition to begin. It was time for the Social Studies Super Bowl. The SSSB is the only time of the year when everyone has a chance to go head-to-head against others from different grades and walks of life. Seniors against seniors, seniors against freshmen, football players against band members, skaters against cheerleaders, even scary gothic kids against mathletes. Each social studies teacher has to have at least one team of three students from each class take part in the competition and some even offer extra credit to teams for each round they make it through. The clear favorite from the junior class was the team of Anthony, Benjamin, and the endless pit of knowledge known as Nektarios Vasilottos, but it is known at City that a senior team takes home the W in the final match of the year. There was no way a team of everyday, average guys with mediocre grades such as Steven, Peter, and I could be expected to win the Super Bowl; we didn’t have a chance. Or did we?

“This ought to be good,” Mr. Bruemmer, our US history teacher, joked as the trio left his classroom and headed to our first matchup.

We entered Mr. Lenard’s room five minutes before it was our turn to duel. After watching the two teams before us going at it, we weren’t too sure what to expect out of our first round. Lenard, the

proud owner of the darkest tan known to man, started by giving us a quick run through of the rules.

As he pulled his index finger back he said, "There will be ten questions this round. All right answers are worth ten points and five will be subtracted in result of a wrong answer."

"The first person to raise a hand will be called upon to answer the question. If they are incorrect, the other team may talk it over and decide on an answer or pass." He continued, now holding the middle finger. "Finally, there will be no cheating," he urged sternly as he moved the ring finger to join the others. "The first time being caught loses your team ten points and the second results in an automatic disqualification."

My teammates and I took a deep breath and exchanged words of encouragement as the abnormally tan government teacher prepared to read the first question. Ten questions and seventy points later we came out victorious and got our passes signed to go back to class.

The following four rounds presented no problems for us as we tore through the competition like a plow through a snow covered road. It wasn't until round six that we met our first true test of wits. It was the dream team of Nektarios, Anthony, and Benjamin. The three had yet to beat a team by less than sixty points and showed no signs of stopping after correctly answering the first three questions of our round. It was at that point that Steven and I watched our Peter turn from the goofy friend we thought we knew to an encyclopedia of knowledge. After both teams failed to answer the final question of regulation, it was tied at thirty-five points apiece. We entered what I expected to be a difficult five question overtime round. Peter not only answered four of the five questions, but he answered three before the questions had been read completely by the sun god. The classroom erupted with screaming and applause after what was the biggest SSSB upset in years.

Sadly, we lost our next match in the championship round of the junior class to another underestimated team of Spencer, Dalton, and Christopher. Luckily, the top two teams from each grade moved on to the big time rounds in the auditorium the next Friday. Reaching the auditorium is the social studies equivalent of being called up from the minor leagues. Everything at the next level is faster. There are Jeopardy buzzers in place of raising hands, there is a scoreboard rather than a chalkboard, and there are fifteen harder questions instead of ten of the

not-so-difficult kind. All three of us spent every period of class for the next week studying history and government books. I spent my Spanish class memorizing the capitals of every Spanish speaking country in the world. Ironically, the capital of Nicaragua, Managua, would be a key answer in the semifinal auditorium round.

Both my team and our newly found junior rivals defeated the two freshmen teams and the two senior teams and were set to battle it out once again for the title of Social Studies Super Bowl Champions. No matter which of us won, a junior team would have been champion for the first time in recent history. After eleven grueling questions, we had a fifty point lead, which led to the following statement from me: “Drop ‘em guys. Drop your buzzers, it’s over.”

Needless to say, Bruemmer was shocked, and my team received a large sum of extra credit points. After winning the competition, I found that a lot of the ideas I had originally thought about education, school, and everyday life weren’t necessarily true, the main thing being that I would never remember anything about school or the information I acquired throughout the years. It wasn’t until the SSSB that I realized that I do remember how a bill becomes a law, I do remember what the Harlem Renaissance was, and, for some reason, I do know that the Sesame Street character Snuffleupagus’s first name is Aloysius. This experience helped me see that everything we learn about in school doesn’t go in one ear and out the other. When a student is taught well and works hard, information actually sticks and can be useful in life.

Academic Essays

Dan Fortney
Jennifer Evan
Robert Braddy
Lakisha Flippin
Jennifer Evan

A Study of Single-Gender Classrooms

In our current society, education is perhaps one of our greatest concerns. It is education that grows us and empowers us with the tools needed for a successful life. It is also at schools, the centers of education, that we learn the tenets of behavior and social interaction. Due to education's importance, a number of related issues have arisen, issues like standardized testing, violence in schools, and what classes students are expected to take. Issues such as these are good, for they help us to improve our system of education and make it a better one for future generations. In this paper, I examine but one of these issues, the separation of classes by gender.

The simplified, general opinion of single-gender classrooms is that single-gender classes create a more educationally focused environment at the cost of hindering students' social development. But is this evaluation correct, and, in light of their advantages and disadvantages, are single-gender classrooms worth creating in public schools?

To answer this question, one must look at both aspects of education – a student's academic and social performance. While the American school may have been primarily intended to educate children academically, it has since its creation come to fulfill an entirely new role, the role of educating them socially. Through the eight hours students spend every day at school, they come to form behaviors, morals, and rules of social interaction that will be carried on, at least in part, into adulthood. Thus, when considering changes like single-gender classrooms, schools must consider both the academic and social impacts which will result.

With this in mind, I have analyzed the topic through seven scholarly journal articles found through the database INSPIRE, and have further explored the issue with field research of my own. Through this research, I have become convinced that single-gender classrooms are capable of improving student achievement not only inside the classroom, but, in many cases, outside of it as well.

A good place to begin examining the educational value of gender separation are the classes in which each gender is typically weakest – that is, language and arts for boys, and math and science

for girls. If single-gender schooling is better than co-education, it should do a better job of educating students in those areas in which they are naturally deficient.

This issue is addressed in a study examining the results of the 2003 Mississippi Curriculum Test, taken every year by students of grades two through eight. The study analyzed the scores of students from single-sex and co-educational classrooms in the areas of reading, language arts, and math. Reading and language arts showed no significant difference between the two groups of girls. However, boys in single-sex classrooms were, 97% of the time, at advanced and proficient levels in reading, as opposed to 85% for co-educational boys. Language and arts saw 88% of boys in single-sex classrooms at advanced and proficient levels, with co-educational boys at 70% (Laster 61). For math, girls in single-sex classrooms only slightly outperformed their co-educational counterparts (94% against 92%), while boys in single-sex classrooms actually did worse than co-educational boys (84% against 90%) (Laster 62).

This data seems to suggest that students of single-sex classes will improve in their gender's "weak area," though the study does so rather unconvincingly for girls. Additionally, the analysis of boys' math scores appears to suggest that an all-boys math class will actually see a decline in student grades.

But what is it about single-gender classrooms that is causing these results? Ursula Kessels and Bettina Hannover attempted to answer this through their comprehensive study of single-gender and co-educational students. Their theory, which the results of the study confirmed, was that students of single-sex classrooms perform better in their gender's weak area due to the limited accessibility of gender-related self-knowledge in a single-sex classroom (276). Essentially, if students' classrooms contain only one gender, it not only becomes much more difficult for them to distinguish these "weak areas," but it is also less discouraging to the student when everyone else is similarly disadvantaged. Thus, students' self-concept of their ability increases, and in turn, so does their performance. It should also be noted that students of single-sex classrooms were found to be less knowledgeable of stereotypical gender traits and slower to recognize them (280).

Does this mean that a single-sex classroom can achieve

better results only by isolating its students entirely from the other gender, as in a military school? Not at all. The phenomenon Kessels and Hannover found in single-sex schools is not a defeminization or demasculinization of students. Rather, single-sex classrooms simply allow students to develop their personalities naturally, rather than be pressured by the stereotypes of their gender. This freedom is not necessarily a good or bad thing, but it is more feasible than complete isolation from the opposite gender.

Joseph and Granleese, in their study of over four hundred adolescent girls from Northern Irish co-educational and single-gender schools, further examined the self-perception of students from each type of classroom. They divided self-perception into five domains – scholastic competence, behavioral conduct, social acceptance, athletic competence, and physical appearance – and derived scores for each based on students' responses to the thirty-six items on the questionnaire. These five domains can be further divided into two clusters. Scholastic competence and behavioral conduct are domains that are not as gender-specific and of which parents are more concerned than the students themselves. Social acceptance, athletic competence, and physical appearance are domains that are more gender-specific and are valued more so by the students than by their parents(526).

The questionnaire found a clear leaning of girls in single-sex classrooms to exhibit a higher level of self-perception in the first cluster, while co-educational girls were shown to possess increased self-perception in the second cluster. When determining students' global self-worth in general, there was no significant gap between the two groups (527).

So, because of this idea of gender-related self-knowledge and its deficiency in single-gender classrooms, girls who attend a single-sex classroom are more likely to improve their behavior and scholastic competence, while girls who attend a co-educational classroom are more likely to improve their athletic ability and social acceptance. Again, this distinction does not clearly favor either option of schooling, but it does show that each has its own unique advantages.

But in general, which provides students with a better education – single-sex or co-educational schooling? A number of studies have attempted to answer this question, most of which

appear to favor single-gender education. However, the question is not so easily answered, because the majority of these studies examine situations where the separation of genders has little or nothing to do with student success. Typically, the quality of the school or the natural ability of its students distorts the results of these studies, making the answers they provide effectively invalid (Robinson and Smithers 23).

To remedy this situation, Dr. Pamela Robinson and Alan Smithers performed a study that was not subject to these flaws. They found that, when comparing single-sex and co-educational schools that are, in all other aspects, as similar as possible, the apparent advantage of single-sex schools largely disappears. Ultimately, the separation of genders itself has no statistically significant effect on students' educational success in single-gender schools (31).

Yet this does not mean that the decision to attend a single-sex or co-educational school is meaningless, even if one is concerned only with the academic aspect of education. Single-sex and co-educational schools may, in general, be equally effective, but individuals will often find a certain option to be more educationally suitable for them, as Robinson and Smithers determined through the responses of the forty-eight girls they interviewed during their study. While several interviewees said they valued the opportunity to work with boys, grow up with them, and exchange points of view, others complained that the boys were less focused and messed around too much. Several girls also admitted that the boys were distracting, while others found the all-girls environment "overcompetitive" and "bitchy" (40).

Of course, to fully evaluate single-sex and educational schools, one must look beyond the academic aspect of education. Students' social education must also be examined. In the aforementioned study, Robinson and Smithers also attempted to evaluate both methods of schools in this of social education. More specifically, they wanted to determine if students of single-sex schools had greater difficulty in adjusting to life at a university – a setting in which the other gender is frequently present. Interestingly, however, when dividing those who found the adjustment difficult into their respective educational backgrounds, there was, once again, no significant statistical difference between

of social education. More specifically, they wanted to determine if students of single-sex schools had greater difficulty in adjusting to life at a university – a setting in which the other gender is frequently present. Interestingly, however, when dividing those who found the adjustment difficult into their respective educational backgrounds, there was, once again, no significant statistical difference between students of single-sex and co-educational schools. Surprisingly, while some students of single-gender classrooms found themselves uneasy in the presence of the other gender, most of the interviewees found it to be a comfortable transition; several even welcomed the change (43).

Since gender roles are not as clearly presented in a single-gender environment, students of single-gender classrooms are more likely to explore career opportunities they would otherwise avoid. For example, women from single-sex schools are twice as likely to take a science-related career as women from co-educational schools (McCollum 19).

Further, women from single-sex schools have also been found to pursue advanced degrees and positions of leadership more frequently. Of all female board members of Fortune 500 companies – a listing of the largest companies in the United States –, one third of them graduated from single-sex institutions (McCollum 19). Similarly, John Kerry, Al Gore, George W. Bush, and his father all attended single-gender schools, and it can hardly be said that they were unprepared for the real world (Horton 3).

Tom Fortney, a former teacher at Le Mans academy, also found that students formed closer friendships and were more responsive to the teachers in an all-boys setting. So while it is possible that students of single-gender classrooms may lose social confidence around the other gender, this loss is made up for, at least in part, by an increase in confidence around members of one's own gender.

Do these advantages make up for the potential problems of single-sex schooling in the area of social confidence? For some, yes, but for what I suspect to be the majority, no.

Yet this distinction is no more conclusive than the distinctions made concerning scholastic achievement. If Robinson and Smithers are correct, it is very rare that a single-sex student

feels socially unprepared for “the real world,” and rarer still that this lack of preparation largely outweighs the other social benefits of single-sex education. The number of single-sex graduates who have become board members for Fortune 500 companies shows that the scales can also be easily aligned in favor of single-sex schooling.

It is true that, with regard to students’ level of social confidence, co-educational schools are, on average, probably a step or two ahead of single-sex schools, but more significant and more clear is that neither method of schooling is strictly better than the other in this way. Some students may find their social confidence at a higher level with co-education, while others may find single-sex schooling to be the better choice.

Looking at both aspects of education together – social and academic – and the comparisons made in each area, it becomes apparent that there is no universal means of determining which method of schooling is superior.

So, in light of this idea of each school type having its own advantages and disadvantages, we return to the idea of single-gender *classrooms*, rather than entire schools. Such classrooms do already exist, but they are rather rare, as many schools are still tentative about the idea.

The basic concept of single-gender classrooms is to take the educational advantages of single-gender schooling without the social disadvantages that would normally follow. Of course, there are, as previously stated, still students who find no educational advantage in a single-gender setting, just as there are students who find that strictly single-sex schools or co-educational classrooms increase their level of social confidence more than single-sex classrooms do. For this reason, single-gender classrooms must be made optional, so that students will not be required to take a single-gender class if it does not benefit them.

One decision to avoid, however, is to make elective, non-universal classes like auto mechanics or child development single-gender, as this discriminates against the gender that is not allowed to take them (Spielhagen 72).

These are merely projections, of course; schools will still need to test the concept of single-gender classrooms for themselves and get an idea of which single-gender classrooms are the

most popular in their region, or which ones are more effective than their co-educational equivalents. There may be failures along the way, so schools should take the transition slowly and be prepared for such failings.

Ultimately, the issue of separation of genders in schools is a matter of choice. Students should be given the choice to attend co-educational schools, and the choice to take the electives they need. As much as possible, they should be given the choice to take single-gender classes at a mixed school, and the choice to attend a school that is entirely single-gender. Students should also be encouraged to try out some single-gender classrooms in middle school. Then, when high school comes, they can make an informed decision as to which type of classroom would benefit them more.

I cannot say that single-gender classes will produce better results than co-educational classes, but I would argue that they can. As these studies have shown, there is no “best” system of education. Some students were shown to benefit more from co-education, while others were shown to benefit more in a single-gender educational setting. Offering individual single-gender classrooms will allow students to conservatively experiment with the single-gender setting, making it possible for them to find the system of education that will best prepare them for the real world.

Work Cited

Fortney, Tom. Personal Interview. 20 Oct. 2009.

Granleese, Jacqueline and Stephen Joseph. "Self-Perception Profile of Adolescent Girls at a Single-Sex and a Mixed-Sex School." *Journal of Genetic Psychology* 154 (1993): 525-529. *INSPIRE*. Web. 11 Sept. 2009.

Horton, Pam. "In a Class By Themselves." *Weekly Reader News – Senior* 83 (2004): 2-3. *INSPIRE*. Web. 11 Sept. 2009.

Kessels, Ursula and Bettina Hannover. "When Being a Girl Matters Less: Accessibility of Gender-Related Self-Knowledge in Single-Sex and Co-educational Classes and Its Impact on Students' Physics-Related Self-Concept of Ability." *British Journal of Educational Psychology* 78 (2008): 273-289. *INSPIRE*. Web. 13 Sept. 2009.

Laster, Carol. "Why We Must Try Same-Sex Instruction." *Education Digest* 70 (2004): 59-62. *INSPIRE*. Web. 11 Sept. 2009.

McCollum, Sean. "Single-Sex Schools: Solution or Setback?" *Literary Cavalcade* 57 (2004): 18-19. *INSPIRE*. Web. 11 Sept. 2009.

Robinson, Pamela and Alan Smithers. "Should the Sexes be Separated for Secondary Education— Comparisons of Single-Sex and Co-Educational Schools?" *Research Papers in Education: Policy and Practice* 14 (1999): 23-49. *INSPIRE*. Web. 11 Sept. 2009.

Spielhagen, Frances R. "How Tweens View Single-Sex Classes." *Educational Leadership* 63 (2006): 68-72. *INSPIRE*. Web. 11 Sept. 2009.

Unsure of Uniforms: Are Assumed Effects Merely Hearsay?

The controversial subject of school uniforms is one that has been debated on many levels. The issue has consistently gained more and more attention throughout the years, and was even a topic addressed by former President Bill Clinton. In regards to local occurrences, school uniforms in Valparaiso have stayed classically associated with private, religious schools, but this is not the case for some nearby Northwest Indiana cities, which include East Chicago, Gary, and Hammond. Schools uniforms may even be gaining ground in public schools in Portage, which is only miles from Valparaiso High School. Many concerns are often brought up when considering mandatory school uniforms, including two of the most popular ones: possibly reducing school-affiliated gang violence, infringing upon students' rights. The former acts as a reinforcer of the pro-uniform side, while the latter is a major facet of anti-uniform efforts. Arguments aside, the question still remains to be answered: Are mandatory uniforms more conducive to a learning environment in schools? While that may be the root of the issue, the question also correlates to whether implementation of a mandatory school uniform policy actually increases positive statistics for education or are the effects of uniforms on test scores and other measures of academic success negligible. While it is clear that the answers to these concerns are difficult to attain and would require extensive research, it is also undoubted that they are important to the school uniform debate. Significant research must be analyzed to support a conclusion that most accurately reflects the truth.

The history of school uniforms is one that has been quite varied over the years, especially in its direct manifestation. While the mandatory school uniform policy is classically associated with private, religiously-affiliated schools, it has now found popularity among various other types of school systems (Brunsma 3). Uniforms have lent a characteristic conservative look to schools for years, most commonly seen in private and/or Catholic schools, which still account for over 65% of the nation's schools with uniform policies (Firmin). However, in current day practices, school uniforms have transformed from their conservative,

Catholic-school vibe to a somewhat more casual, yet professional look (Gereluk). It is unclear whether this change in the look of uniforms is a cause or a result of the occurrence of public, non-religiously affiliated schools adopting uniform policies. What is clear, however, is that uniforms have become increasingly popular among our nation's public schools (Cruz 33). In fact, a decade ago at the beginning of the 1997-1998 school year, the Council of the Great City Schools reported that more than 50% of the nation's urban public schools had uniform policies instituted, which accounts for thousands of schools (Cruz 33). Proving the validity of the report, data from the end of the 1996-1997 school year show nation-wide statistics on public school uniform policies (Brunsma 20). From the total amount of public schools in major U.S. cities, more than 80% in Chicago had uniforms, 66% of Cleveland's, 60% in Miami, 50% in Boston, and only 10-25% in New York (Brunsma 20). As the percentages show, the overwhelming majority of public schools in very urban major cities had uniform policies. Most non-parochial schools in smaller towns nation-wide still lacked uniform policies, with only a sprinkling of suburban and rural public schools boasting uniform policies (Gereluk). The large-scale success of uniform implementation in urban schools nation-wide may have been a result of former President Bill Clinton's endorsement of uniforms and their possible benefits in his 1996 State of the Union address (Firmin). While school uniform policies have historically experienced much popularity in both private, religious schools and public schools, current day efforts are now delving further into the phenomenon by seeking empirical evidence on the actual effects of uniforms in schools.

Local occurrences of school uniform policies in the Northwest Indiana region have maintained rather classic views of implementation over the years. The city of Valparaiso has a few schools that are private and/or parochial. Montessori School for preschool and kindergarten aged children is a private school that is not religiously affiliated. Schools that are both private and religiously affiliated include St. Paul's Catholic School and Immanuel Lutheran, both at the elementary and middle school level, and Valparaiso University at the college level. In Valparaiso, the only schools that have a school uniform

policy are St. Paul's and Immanuel Lutheran, both of which are private, parochial schools. This evidence is a support to the classically held views that private, religiously-affiliated schools have school uniforms.

Other cities in our immediate area, however, have different views on uniform policies in schools. In East Chicago, for example, all schools, both public and private, have mandatory school uniforms. Additionally, Gary schools also have the same policy of all schools, regardless of public or private designation, having mandatory school uniforms. In the case of Gary schools, however, the uniform policy was just recently expanded to cover public schools in 2006, while East Chicago has had city-wide policies for mandatory school uniforms for many years. Furthermore, Hammond High School just recently instituted a uniform policy for the start of the 2007-2008 school year and some school officials in Portage Township are also pushing for following suit with a uniform policy for Portage High School sometime in the next few years (Burton). The current efforts of many public schools in the area surrounding Valparaiso who have instituted, or seek to institute, uniform policies is yet another facet of the growing trend. The reasons for uniform implementation in public schools are varied and are directly related to the benefits that the schools expect to see.

Many sound reasons do exist for why a public school would seek to implement a uniform policy. However, these reasons range from being quite likely to be seen as effects of uniform implementation to merely best-case scenarios. Primary aims for introducing a uniform policy include reducing violence and behavioral problems, eliminating drama and biases based on fashions and clothing choices, harboring school pride, and increasing students' positive self-view and desire to do schoolwork (Brunsma 183). Secondary reasons include lowering the cost parents face in buying clothing for children and promoting a more official, formal learning environment (Cruz 36-40). One of the primary reasons that is receiving the most attention is the desire to squelch distractions in school that are caused by students' fashion choices (Firmin). Both inappropriate dress on the part of the students and the factor of expensive and designer clothing

creating a visible, distinguishing difference between students of various socioeconomic groups makes eliminating clothing competition a noble goal (Brunsma 64). Whether uniforms actually accomplish this intent and successfully dissolve the divide between students who can and cannot afford the latest fashions is another issue. This possible effect will be examined and discussed in full as it applies to public schools.

Some strong advocates of pro-uniforms in public schools seem to think that the weight each reason carries as a cause for implementation carries an equivalent or similar effect as a perceived benefit. However, this is not always the case. As psychology would boast, a double-blind study would be needed to accurately support the theory that expected benefits of a uniform policy are the same as the effects that are actually seen. However, since conducting a double-blind study in schools is inevitably difficult, due to obvious compound factors of faculty and students, the assumption of expected benefits continues to be an issue. The dichotomy between expected benefits and actual effects is a pivotal aspect to the question of whether or not uniform implementation actually creates a school environment that is more conducive to learning.

A significant issue with the evidence that pro-uniform advocates use is that it tends to be largely speculation. Supporters of the school uniform often vouch that uniforms improve learning environments in schools, thus leading to an increase in better grades, behavior, and motivation (Huss). This speculation, unfortunately, is the grounds on which most of the evidence showing the alleged benefits of school uniforms rests. Additionally, the pro-uniform side also argues that there is a lack of empirical research that has been done to produce statistics of before and after school uniform implementation, and therefore we can only assume that environments improve (Brunsma 28-29). This is not the case at all. Volumes of research have been done that show the effects of uniforms on schools after implementation (Brunsma 29). Why do pro-uniform supporters choose to ignore the empirical evidence and claim that there has not been any sufficient research done on the effects of uniforms? One can easily assume that this is done because the empirical research does not show a correlation between expected benefits and actual effects, which would be much

to the dismay of pro-uniform arguments. Only through examination of the research itself can one appropriately and logically reach this conclusion.

Beyond mere anecdotal evidence and suggested benefits that school uniforms can lead to, the debate is furthered by the fact that many variables exist independently of each other in a school environment. If the presence of a positive benefit after uniform implementation is indeed found, this could be the result of any number of other variables, instead of a direct result of the uniforms themselves (Firmin). Can we really attest that it is a direct consequence of the uniform wearing that leads to such changes in the quality of education received and strengthening of the school's learning environment? High school headmaster William Wassell does not believe we can. "I honestly don't feel the wearing of uniforms will enhance the atmosphere in a school. A lot of other factors determine the atmosphere and environment that exists in a school." His stance represents similar beliefs that many people hold. Board member of Portage Townships schools Cheryl Oprisko also needs more convincing on the actual benefits of uniforms, instead of just those that are assumed (Burton). She remarks that before she supports the implementation of a uniform policy in Portage High School she needs to see more than anecdotal evidence (Burton). The need for analysis of the research conducted on schools that implement a uniform policy is indispensable to the concern of the legitimacy of the possible benefits.

The overwhelming quantity of research done on effects of school uniforms seen in varying schools all over the United States lends a certain degree of complexity to the results. To simplify analyses, data will be discussed as it relates to what area the public school is found and the characteristics of the school itself. A public elementary school in an inner city neighborhood of Stockton, California is among the earliest research done on schools that implement uniforms (Huss). After instituting uniforms in the 1995-1996 school year, it was observed that the school experienced less discipline problems and an increased sense of pride in the school, which served as a pleasant change to the area that the school was in which was largely overtaken by crime and gang violence (Huss). In another public school, similar effects were observed. Central High School, located in a very urban area in Kansas City, Missouri, implemented a uniform policy in order to combat poor academics and the high levels of crime and gang violence both inside and outside

of the school (Brennan). The improvements seen in the school include more ordered, disciplined students and an increase sense of school pride by administrators (Brennan). While it is arguable whether these observed effects are permanent in the school environment, a more long-term effect can be seen in the steady increase in academic scores in Central High School (Brennan). The apparent success of uniform policies in schools located in urban, gang and violence rampant areas does serve as some evidence to the positive effects that uniforms can lead to.

The research that shows that uniforms can lead to a better school environment in urban, high crime areas is further supported by local evidence. East Chicago and Gary, which were previously mentioned as holding uniform policies in all public schools, are also very urban areas with similar problems. Both cities notoriously experience high crime rates and dangerous gang activity. They are also both very close to the large city of Chicago, Illinois. The demographic components of East Chicago and Gary are also directly comparable to the populations of urban Chicago. Large African-American and Hispanic populations make up the majority of both cities, as well as Chicago. Additionally, the populations of both cities experience a low average income and other socioeconomic hardships. These characteristics of East Chicago and Gary may have innately led to the benefits both cities experienced upon implementing uniforms in all public schools.

It is dually noted that schools in poor, urban areas with high crime and gang activity have historically reported less academic success in students (Brunsma 187). Other statistics show that lower-class, minority populations further experience exacerbated conditions upon living in urban areas with high crime (Brunsma 188). The less than ideal characteristics of East Chicago and Gary do not foster an appropriate school environment to learning. However, as evidence shows, schools in urban areas can stimulate a positive learning environment and lower rates of gang violence and crime in schools through implementation of a uniform policy (Brunsma 187-188). The differences between schools in urban, lower socioeconomic class areas as opposed to those in suburban higher class cities, such as Valparaiso, lend to disparities between benefits and effects seen after implementing school uniform policies.

The consistency between expected benefits and actual effects of school uniforms is so far only applicable to public schools in urban, low-socioeconomic class, high violence areas. The success many

schools have had with improved behavior and academics demonstrates that uniforms can be a positive step for schools with behavioral, violence, and gang problems. As promising as this is, evidence shows it does not transfer to public schools in middle to high socioeconomic cities. The fact that the vast majority of public schools in the United States with uniform policies are in urban cities with the aforementioned characteristics lends insight into the question on whether uniforms in schools will lead to an increase in positive effects (Brunsma 188). Research shows that uniforms will have no significant effect in improving learning and educational atmosphere in schools where no such problem exists (Brunsma 181). Public schools in areas of higher socioeconomic class, and in suburban areas in general, show no significant impact in improving behavior and discipline in students and stimulating a learning environment (Brunsma 182). In addition, students in middle-class public schools with a uniform policy reported lower levels of self-perception than those in equivalent schools without a uniform policy (Wade and Stafford). In another study, a Midwest, suburban school actually saw increased levels of aggression in students through retaliation against the instituted uniform policy (DaCosta). We can accurately and appropriately conclude from the summation of empirical research done on various schools that uniforms will not produce the expected benefits in all schools.

Yet another factor that seems to play a role in the increasingly complex question proposed on whether school uniforms positively affect learning is the subjectivity of measured effects. Most sources of positive effects witnessed in schools come from faculty and administrators (Huss). The fact that these observations are naturally biased towards expecting to see positive effects in behavior of students, school spirit, and a more promising learning environment must be taken into consideration when examining evidence supporting uniforms. It is interesting to note that when compared to data collected from the same surveys given to students and school faculty alike, that students perceived no change in gang activity or level of violence, while teachers perceived lower levels of both (Wade and Stafford). This difference in how the school was perceived to be affected by uniforms signifies a definite degree of subjectivity in observable effects of uniforms.

Certain things can be somewhat appropriately deduced based

on the characteristics of the public schools that have instituted uniform policies and the reported effects. It can be concluded that implementation of a school uniform policy is likely to produce positive effects in urban, lower socioeconomic class public schools. Effects include less school violence, gang activity, and behavioral problems, along with a possibility of an increase in education received by students. However, uniforms will produce no significant changes in the same areas in schools that are suburban and/or higher socioeconomic class. Uniforms can even lead to a decrease in student self-perception and an increase in behavioral problems in some schools. In conclusion, while uniform policies in public schools may alleviate some major problems that are related to location of the school, widespread uniform policies are not advisable for all public schools as they can also lead to negative effects. To answer our question, school uniforms are more conducive to a learning environment in public schools with significant issues, especially those due to a poor surrounding community, but their effects are negligible to negative in public schools without any major problems.

Works Cited

Brennan, Timothy. "Do Uniforms Make Our Schools Better?

I've Seen Them Boost Climate." *American Teacher*

89.5 (2005). *Academic Search Premier*. Web. 12 Apr.

2009.

Brunsma, David L. *The School Uniform Movement and What It*

Tells Us about American Education: A Symbolic Crusade.

Lanham, Md: Scarecrow Education, 2004.

Burton, Jeff. "School Official Pushes for Uniforms." *The Times*.

19 Feb. 2009. Web. 14 Apr. 2009.

Cruz, Barbara. *School Dress Codes: A Pro/Con Issue*. New

Jersey: Enslow, 2003.

DaCosta, K. "Dress Code Blues: An Exploration of Urban

Students' Reactions to a Public High School Uniform

Policy." *The Journal of Negro Education* 75.1 (2006):

49-59. *WilsonWeb*. Web. 12 Apr. 2009.

Firmin, Michael. "School Uniforms: A Qualitative Analysis of Aims and Accomplishments at Two Christian Schools." *Journal of Research on Christian Education* 15.1 (2006): 143-168. *WilsonWeb*. Web. 11 Apr. 2009.

Gereluk, D. "What Not to Wear: Dress Codes and Uniform Policies in the Common School." *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 41.4 (2007): 643-657. *WilsonWeb*. Web. 11 Apr. 2009.

Huss, John A. "The Role of School Uniforms in Creating an Academically Motivating Climate: Do Uniforms Influence Teacher Expectations? " *Journal of Ethnographic and Qualitative Research* 1 (2007): 31-39. *Academic Search Premier*. Web. Apr.12 2009.

The Great Debate

The Pros and Cons of Guns in the Classroom

Throughout its history, the United States has had a fascination with guns. Americans have used guns in times of war, for protection, and for hunting. Americans also use guns when they are intent on killing people. When violence happens in school shootings, drive-by shootings, assassination of public officials, or in the workplace and shopping malls, Americans demand something be done. This demand fuels the debate between gun rights and gun control activists. It fuels the debate over the interpretation of the Second Amendment. It fuels the debate on allowing citizens to carry concealed weapons in gun-free zones. This makes us ask the question: Should guns be banned from college campuses?

Two recent college campus massacres have triggered a renewed interest in this debate. On the morning of April 16, 2007, a deeply troubled young man named Seung Hui Cho used two pistols to murder thirty-two students and faculty members, as well as killing himself, at Virginia Tech University in Blacksburg, Virginia (Feldman 284). The second incident happened on February 14, 2008 at Northern Illinois University in DeKalb, Illinois. The twenty-seven year old gunman, Steven Kazmierczak, walked into a lecture hall with three handguns and a shotgun and fired fifty-four rounds from the weapons. He fatally shot five students and himself and wounded sixteen others (Goldman).

These two incidents have brought the gun control vs. the gun rights debate back to the college campuses. The heart of the debate focuses on whether allowing concealed weapons in a college classroom setting can save lives if a similar catastrophe happens again. Activists across the United States are joining forces to make their voices heard. One such group, Students for Concealed Carry on Campus (SCCC) advocate that students who are concealed handgun license holders should have the right to carry these concealed handguns into university buildings. In opposition, a group called Protest Easy Guns believes that students should not have guns on college campuses (Bella).

Students for Concealed Carry On Campus (SCCC) is a national, non-partisan, grassroots organization with over thirty-five thousand college students, professors, college employees, and parents of college students that was formed after the Virginia Tech tragedy.

SCCC has members in all fifty states and the District of Columbia and has two main functions. First, they want to dispel the myths and misconceptions about concealed carry on campus. They point to studies that agree that concealed handgun license holders are five times less likely than non-license holders to commit violent crimes. The second function is to push state legislators and school administrators to grant concealed handgun license holders the same rights on college campuses that those licensees currently enjoy in most other unsecured locations (ConcealedCampus.com). The SCCC sponsored an empty holster protest on October 22 through October 26, 2007. The protest took place in almost all of the one-hundred-eleven universities and colleges represented in the group. Students wore empty gun holsters around their campuses (Bella).

Protest Easy Guns is a grassroots movement focused on protesting lax United States gun laws. They feel these lax laws provide criminals and dangerous individuals easy access to guns. They believe that students should not have guns on college campuses. Compelled by the tragic murders committed on the Virginia Tech campus, thirty-two members of the group staged a demonstration on April 22, 2007 by lying on the ground in front of City Hall in Alexandria, Virginia for several minutes. It was a symbolic protest remembering the thirty-two people killed and the amount of time it took for Seung Hui Cho to obtain his guns ("What We Want"). This group encourages Americans to write their congressmen to vote for a bill that will close the gun show loophole. The present law allows unlicensed, private dealers to sell guns to people without conducting a background check. They also want Congress to reinstate the assault weapons ban which expired in 2004. Guns such as semiautomatic AK-47s and Uzis are easily available along with high-capacity magazines. It was the availability of such magazines that Seung Hui Cho used to kill so many people so quickly ("What We Want").

Gun control laws on campuses are being reconsidered by many states after the much publicized shootings at Virginia Tech and Northern Illinois Universities. Nadine Mahasneh's writing in the February 28, 2008 issue of *The Exponent* states that according to an article published in *USA Today*, twelve states have been considering bills that would allow people to carry concealed weapons on public university campuses. The Indiana Senate did vote on a bill that would allow people with permits to carry handguns on state property, except in specific

places such as airports. The bill did not pass (Mahasneh). Since the fall semester of 2008, Utah's state law has allowed licensed individuals to carry concealed handguns on the campuses of all nine public colleges in Utah. Concealed carry has been allowed at Colorado State University in Fort Collins, Colorado since 2003 and at Blue Ridge Community College in Weyers Cove, Virginia since 1995. None of these schools have seen a single resulting incident of gun violence, a single gun accident, or a single gun theft (Concealed Campus.com).

In Indiana, one must be eighteen years old to purchase a rifle or shotgun. One does not need a permit or license to do so. The weapon does not need to be registered. One must be twenty-one and have a permit to carry a handgun. It is unlawful for any person to sell or give a firearm to any person who is a convicted felon, a drug or alcohol abuser, or is mentally incompetent. A dealer must do a National Instant Criminal Background Check. It is unlawful to possess a firearm on school property, property used for a school function, or a school bus. An application for a license to carry a handgun must be made to the chief law enforcement officer of the municipality where the applicant resides. The officer to whom the application is made shall conduct an investigation into the applicant's official records and verify his character, reputation, and information in the application. A set of fingerprints will be taken. The application will be granted or rejected within six days. The license is valid for four years ("What are the Gun Laws in Indiana"). Purdue University's position on gun control allows only law enforcement officers to carry firearms on campus (Mahasneh).

Like most college campuses, Washington, D.C. had a ban on concealed handguns for thirty-two years. The City Council that adopted the ban said it was justified because "handguns have no legitimate use in the purely urban environment of the District of Columbia" ("Justices"). Dick Anthony Heller, an armed security guard in Washington, D.C. did not agree. He sued the District after it rejected his application to keep a handgun at his home for protection ("Justices"). The case was referred to the United States Supreme Court in March, 2008. The Court's five to four ruling struck down the District of Columbia's thirty-two year old handgun ban as incompatible with gun rights under the Second Amendment in June, 2008. The court also struck down Washington's requirement that firearms be equipped with trigger locks or kept disassembled. It left intact the licensing of guns ("Court Rules").

The Second Amendment's unusual phrasing and punctuation states, "A well regulated militia being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the People to keep and bear arms, shall not be infringed." Gun control opponents contend, "the right of the People to keep and bear arms" is an individual right. Gun control proponents view the Second Amendment as protecting a collective right to own a gun. For them, it means the militias have the right to keep and bear arms and that the government has the power and authority to regulate the use and sale of firearms (Roleff 59-60). In 1939, the United States Supreme Court ruled that the Second Amendment did not protect an individual's right to own a shotgun in the *United States v. Miller* case because such a right did not have a "reasonable relationship to the preservation or efficiency of a well regulated militia." Most courts then accepted the collective rights interpretation of the Second Amendment. In the 1998 *United States v. Emerson* case, the Court supported a restriction on Timothy Emerson's right to own a gun because he was under a protective order for domestic violence. The court also found that individual law-abiding Americans are guaranteed the right to own a gun under the Second Amendment (Haerens 116-17). It seems the Supreme Court is not absolutely sure of the Second Amendment interpretation. The 2008 decision on the Washington, D.C. handgun ban was only overruled by a five to four vote in favor of individual rights.

While all states have rules and regulations on who can or cannot purchase a gun, they are not uniform across the United States. Therefore, tragic events involving guns often bring cries from the American people for federal gun control legislation. Such an event was the assassination attempt on President Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1933 (Feldman 37). The 1930's also saw gangster violence by such well-known criminals as John Dillinger, Al Capone, and Baby Face Nelson. In response to this activity, the National Firearms Act of 1934 became the first attempt at federal control legislation. It was felt something needed to be done to control the spread of weapons into the general population. The Act imposed a two-hundred dollar tax on machine gun and short-barrel firearms. This was a large sum of money in 1934. The idea was to tax such weapons out of circulation (Roleff 124). The Federal Firearms Act of 1938 introduced the concept of the Federal Firearms License for anyone selling or repairing firearms. The holder of such a license was required to not sell to any convicted felon.

The seller must maintain customer records for all firearms and ammunition sales. The Act also made possession of firearms with an altered serial number a crime (Currie 21).

The assassinations of President John F. Kennedy in 1963, civil rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in April, 1968, and United States Senator Robert Kennedy in June, 1968 led to the passage of the Gun Control Act of 1968 (Feldman 39-40). This act prohibited the interstate transfer of guns, prohibited shipping guns and ammunition through the mail system, established a minimum age for firearm purchasers, required all firearms to have a serial number, and expanded the categories of prohibited persons (Currie 21-22).

A third tragic event led to the passage of the Brady Handgun Prevention Act in 1993. On March 30, 1981, John W. Hinckley, Jr. using a .22 caliber Rohm RG-14 revolver fired six rounds in Washington, D.C. hitting President Ronald Reagan in his lung and wounding three others. Press secretary, James S. Brady was one of them. He sustained a wound to his forehead that permanently disabled him (Feldman 12). Criminals and others who were ineligible to buy firearms could easily purchase guns by lying about their background. The Brady Act provided for mandatory background checks and a five-business-day waiting period for the purchase of all revolvers and semiautomatic pistols (Feldman 179-81).

The gun debate is about whether or not stricter gun control laws should be enacted in the United States. Gun control proponents believe that gun control laws would save more lives. Gun control opponents believe the same laws would take away lives. There are two major groups in the United States that debate and promote gun related issues. The largest and oldest group is the National Rifle Association (NRA). It is a nationwide gun club that was established in 1871 by two Civil War veterans who were upset by lack of marksmanship in their men during the Civil War. Over the years, the NRA has promoted the shooting sport among America's youth. In 1949, they established the first hunter education program. The NRA became the only national trainer of law enforcement officers in 1960. Today the NRA is an active defender of the Second Amendment claiming it protects a citizen's right to gun ownership. The NRA also lobbies Congress to relax gun and ammunition restrictions. The NRA has nearly four million members (Roleff 72-73).

The gun control advocates banded together and formed the

National Council to Control Handguns in 1974. It was organized by Mack Borinsky after he was a victim of a robbery at gunpoint. The name was later changed to Handgun Control, Inc. (HCI). Their original purpose was to ban handguns in the United States. They soon adopted a more moderate mission of supporting the enactment and enforcement of gun control laws. They claimed this would ensure only law-abiding citizens could purchase guns. Sarah Brady is HCI's most well-known activist. She fought for gun regulations such as laws requiring adults to store their guns in places inaccessible to children. In 1986, the Law-Enforcement Officer's Protection Act was passed. It bans armor-piercing bullets. The Undetectable Firearms Act was passed in 1988. It outlaws guns that cannot be detected in an airport metal detector. It took HCI until 1993 before they could get the Brady Law passed. The NRA managed to block it for several years (Currie 22-24).

School violence does not just happen on the college campus. A timeline from the book *School Shootings and School Violence* by Barbara Cruz showed there were fifty-seven teachers and students killed and one-hundred-five persons wounded in twenty-seven school shooting incidents across the United States from 1978 to 2001. Most of the killers were teenagers, but in Mount Morris Township, Michigan, a six-year old boy shot and killed a female classmate in their first-grade classroom on February 29, 2000 (Cruz 53-54). The Columbine High School shooting on April 20, 1999 gained national attention. Two teenage boys killed thirteen people and wounded twenty-three before they killed themselves. The boys entered the school armed with sawed-off shotguns, a semiautomatic rifle, a semiautomatic pistol, and pipe bombs (Thomas 14-15). It seems violent incidents happen at all age levels. Elementary, junior high, and high school students would not be old enough to carry a concealed weapon.

One must ask, "If students were allowed to carry concealed weapons into a college classroom would it offer protection in case of an attack?" In an April 10, 2009 ABC television broadcast of *20/20*, Diane Sawyer and David Muir reported on a demonstration showing how the average college student would react in different crisis situations. The students were trained and then given a concealed gun to take to a classroom. When a surprise attack occurred, most students found the gun did not protect them. In fact, it seemed to make them more vulnerable to attack. One student simply froze. One could not get the gun out of the holster. One stood up to aim the gun and became a target. It

was found the other students ran in all directions screaming when confronted by an attacker. They explained how one's vision narrows in on the attacker making it very likely the concealed gun holder would be in danger of shooting either a fellow classmate or themselves ("If I Only Had a Gun").

As can be seen, the gun control vs. the gun rights debate is very complex and permeates every fiber of American society. Every American is vulnerable and could be involved in a tragic situation sometime during their lifetime. For those who spend time in gun-free zones on college and university campuses, one becomes part of the debate. If you land on the gun rights side, what will you do to promote the wise use of guns? If you land on the gun control side, how will you provide a safe environment within the classroom as well as in society? The issues are out there. The debate is ongoing. Should one be allowed to carry a concealed weapon in a gun-free zone or should one be denied this privilege? The debate is yours.

Works Cited

- Bella, Tim. "Campuses Debate Gun Control Issues." *Daily Skiff* 30 Nov. 2007. Web. 27 Mar. 2009.
- "Concealed Campus.com." Students for Concealed Carry on Campus. Web. 28 Mar 2009.
- "Court Rules in Favor of Second Amendment Gun Right." *Los Angeles Times* 26 June 2008. Web. 3 Apr. 2009.
- Cruz, Barbara. *School Shootings and School Violence*. Berkeley Heights, NJ: Enslow, 2002.
- Currie-McGhee, L.K. *Gun Control*. Farmington Hills, MI: Lucent, 2004.
- Feldman, Richard. *Ricochet Confessions of a Gun Lobbyist*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley, 2008.
- Goldman, Russell. "Gunman Planned Campus Shooting for at Least a Week." ABCnews.com ABC, 2008. Web. 14 Mar. 2008.
- Haerens, Margaret. *Gun Violence*. New York: Greenhaven, 2006.
- "If I only Had a Gun." *20/20*. Narr. Diane Sawyer and David Muir. ABC. 10 Apr. 2009. Television.
- "Justices Set to Mull Gun Rights." MSNBC.com. MSNBC, 2008. Web. 18 Mar. 2008.

Mahasneh, Nadine. "Issues Raise Questions in Wake of Tragedies."

The Exponent Online 28 Feb. 2008. Web. 14 Mar 2008

Roleff, Tamara L. *Gun Control*. Farmington Hills, MI: Greenhaven, 2007.

Thomas, Murray. *Violence in America's Schools*. Westport, CT: Praeger, 2006.

"What Are the Gun Laws in Indiana." *About.com*. Web. 3 Apr. 2009.

"What We Want." *Protest Easy Guns*. Web. 4 April 2009.

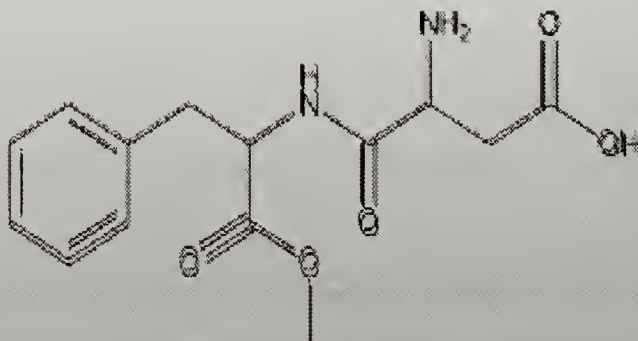
Aspartame in the Membrane

When aspartame was first discovered in 1965, many people believed that it would be the answer to their prayers. Who wouldn't want to eat guilt-free sweets? James Schlatter, a chemist with GD Searle & Company, was working in the laboratory and tasted his fingers to discover that they were sweet. His accidental discovery seemed to be just what many people were looking for¹. In 1981 the FDA approved aspartame for use in certain food products, and in 1982 the product made its first appearance in Diet Coke. Today, the product can be found in everything from diet carbonated sodas, to low calorie desserts, to breakfast cereal, and it has been slowly creeping into many other products for people who are craving "sweet" (but want to cheat).

Since its approval, Aspartame's producer, Monsanto, has vehemently defended the safety of its product, but some researchers say that aspartame is anything but safe. Almost as soon as aspartame was introduced, so began speculations about its safety and the possible effects it may have on human health. Some have speculated that aspartame may

have a particularly detrimental effect on brain chemistry (Humphries et. al, 2008). This paper examines the physiological processes of aspartame metabolism and the possible effects of high dosage aspartame usage on health, particularly brain chemistry.

Figure 1: The Structure of Aspartame



Structure and General Metabolism

The structure of aspartame is presented in Figure 1. Aspartame is a methyl ester, comprised of two amino acids, phenylalanine and aspartic acid. The molecular formula for aspartame is $C_{14}H_{18}N_2O_5$, and the IUPAC name is N-(L- α -aspartyl)-L-phenylalanine, 1-methyl ester (Ekong).

¹ The writer withholds judgment on the horrible lab technique would make tasting an unknown product seem like a good idea.

Upon ingestion, aspartame is first hydrolyzed in the intestine by esterases and peptidases. This occurs in the gastrointestinal lumen (Magnuson et. al, 2007, p.645) and the hydrolysis produces three principle breakdown products: phenylalanine, aspartate, and methanol.

Phenylalanine

Approximately 50% of the breakdown product from aspartame² is phenylalanine. When phenylalanine is metabolized a small part is first hydroxylated and converted to tyrosine in the liver by hepatic phenylalanine hydroxylase (Magnuson, 2007, p. 700). The other portion remains unconverted to tyrosine. Humphries (2007) speculates that the portion of the amino acid which remains unconverted can cross the blood brain barrier intact (p.453). In order to do this however both fractions must bind to a large, neutral amino acid transporter (NAAT) which can carry them across the blood brain barrier (Humphries, 2007, p.454).

NAAT is also a transporter for other amino acids, including tryptophan, methionine, and the branched chain amino acids. Since all of these amino acids compete for the same transporter, large quantities of phenylalanine means that it will occupy the active sites on most molecules of the transporter, and levels of phenylalanine in the brain are likely to increase (Humphries, 2007, p.453).

Aspartic Acid

Approximately 40% of aspartame's breakdown product is aspartic acid (Ekong, 2009). Aspartic acid is a non-essential amino acid which may be synthesized in the brain from glucose and other precursors (Magnuson et. al, 2007, p.648). It is metabolized within the enterocytes, absorptive cells lining the villi of the small intestines. Maher (1987) reported that is unlikely that aspartic acid is able to cross the blood brain barrier (p. 54). However, Vences-Mejia (2006) reported that aspartic acid can have an effect on neuronal enzymes (p. 456).

Methanol

Methanol is the final breakdown product of aspartame. Methanol forms about 10% of the breakdown product, and high levels of methanol have been associated with "vision disorders, headache, tinnitus, dizziness, nausea" and a host of other metabolic problems (Ekong,

²Phenylalanine is ketogenic and glucogenic (Ekong), meaning that it is an amino acid that can be used to form ketone bodies through ketogenesis or glucose through gluconeogenesis.

2009). On first glance this may sound frightening; however, some fresh fruits and vegetables are also broken down to methanol (Muldoon, 1978, p. 1454). Methanol enters the bloodstream and is oxidized in the liver to formaldehyde (Magnuson, p.700). Formaldehyde may be further broken down into formate, a highly toxic substance which has been known to cause blindness (Humphries, p. 451).

Brain Chemistry

Amino acids like tyrosine and tryptophan, which are out-competed for position on NAAT upon ingestion of large quantities of aspartame, have important roles to play in maintaining brain chemistry. Some researchers have argued that when high quantities of phenylalanine are present after aspartame ingestion, the phenylalanine displaces precursors like tyrosine and tryptophan to cross the blood brain barrier and causes drastic changes in the production of important neurotransmitters like dopamine and serotonin (Humphries, 2008, p. 451).

One consequence of lowered tyrosine levels is lower concentrations of dopamine in the brain (Humphries, 2007, p.454). The loss of dopamine is related to neurological disorders such as Parkinson's disease. Tryptophan is an important precursor in serotonin production. There is a well-documented link between reduced levels of serotonin in the brain and increased incidence of depression.

Vences-Mejia (2008) reported that aspartic acid is an excitatory neurotransmitter (p.453) which can lead to an increase in certain metabolizing enzymes in the brain. One of these enzymes is cytochrome P450. Cytochrome P450 plays a part in the "aromatization of androgens to estrogens" and the "formation of catechols, and it may also participate in the metabolism of other neurotransmitters" (Vences-Mejia, p. 454). The effect that this may have on overall neuronal function has yet to be determined.

Consumption of aspartame by rats has affected their learning behavior. In Guinea Pigs, aspartame ingestion during gestation disrupted odour-associative learning (Vences-Mejia, 2006, p. 453). And a recent study indicated another impairment by showing that that rats exposed to high amounts of aspartame took longer to find the reward in a t-maze (Vences-Mejia, 2006, p.453).

Conclusion

Many studies have been conducted in an attempt to prove or

disprove the safety claims made by aspartame's producer, Monsanto; however, many scientists have argued that these tests are inconclusive because they have been conducted on animals and some studies overlook the fact that the ways in which animals and humans metabolize aspartame is greatly different. Humphries (2008) reports that the most common animals used for aspartame testing are approximately 60 times less sensitive to aspartame as humans (p.458). Humans are 10-20 times more sensitive to methanol poisoning and humans are 8-10 times more sensitive to aspartic acid as animals (p.458).

As many as 92% of independently funded studies have shown that aspartame has at least the potential for adverse effects (Briffa, 2006, p. 309). However, the jury is still out. Responsible consumers should consider the risks before they crack the seal on that next can of diet bliss. As American waistlines continue to grow, so has the extensivity of this potentially dangerous product. It is even slipping into places we might not otherwise expect to find it, including foods which are not explicitly labeled as "diet." Magnuson (2007) reports that aspartame may be found in more than 6000 products (p. 354).

In 1993 Cypress Hill released a single about addiction: "Insane in the Membrane." The title of this paper plays on the title of that song because aspartame addiction is a serious problem for many Americans. One group member raps about how his addiction is: "Makin' my mind slow / That's why I don't mess with the big four-oh."

The big four here are diet candy, diet baked goods, no-calorie table top sweeteners, and of course, diet carbonated beverages. If consumers are drinking aspartame in large quantities, it may indeed make the mind slow. The use of this chemical is controversial at best.

References

- Briffa, J. (2005). Aspartame and its effects on health. *BMJ*, 330: 308-311.
- Cypress Hill (1993). Insane in the Brain. *Black Sunday* [CD]. New York: Ruffhouse Columbia Records.
- Ekong, M. (2009). Aspartame: Sweet or bitter. *Internet Journal of Health*, 9(1), 2. Retrieved from Academic Search Premier database November 19, 2009. (43458135)
- Humphries, P., Pretorius, E., & Naudé, H. (2008). Direct and indirect cellular effects of aspartame on the brain. *European Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, 62(4), 451-462. doi:10.1038/sj.ejcn.1602866.
- Figure 2. Diagram. *European Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, 62(4), 451-462. doi:10.1038/sj.ejcn.1602866.
- Maher, T. and Wurtman, R. (1987). Possible neurologic effects of aspartame, a widely used food additive. *Environmental Health Perspectives* 75:53-57. Retrieved November 24, 200 from PubMed Central.

Opperman, J.A.m and Muldoon, E., and Ranney, R.E. Metabolism of aspartame in monkeys. *JN the Journal of Nutrition*. Retrieved November 24, 2009 from www.jnnutrition.org.

Vences-Mejía, A., Labra-Ruíz, N., Hernández-Martínez, N., Dorado-González, V., Gómez-Garduño, J., Pérez-López, I., et al. (2006). The effect of aspartame on rat brain xenobiotic- metabolizing enzymes. *Human & Experimental Toxicology*, 25(8), 453-459. Retrieved from Academic Search Premier database. doi:10.1191/0960327106het646oa

Alzheimer's Disease in Society: Research Efforts Investigate a Cure through Immunotherapy

Some degree of dementia associated with aging is not uncommon, especially in those individuals who are eighty years of age and older. This normal age-related dementia includes forgetfulness and minor memory loss (Swartzberg & Margen, 2001). However, this does not even begin to resemble the effects of Alzheimer's Disease, a dementia-related condition of the brain. Alzheimer's Disease is characterized by the gradual, irreversible progression of damage to the brain, and the ensuing effect it has on the functioning of those afflicted. Unlike age-related dementia, Alzheimer's Disease can make itself known early on-set, which is classified in people 65 years of age and younger (Swartzberg & Margen, 2001). While loss of cognitive ability and physiological control of behavior are among the outwardly observable characteristics of AD, they are only symptoms that correspond to the accumulating effect of damage to the brain of the Alzheimer's—afflicted individual (Swartzberg & Margen, 2001). Pathologically, Alzheimer's Disease is characterized by the presence on the brain of amyloid-beta plaques and neurofibrillary tangles, that latter of which is due to the hyperphosphorylation of tau proteins (DaSilva, Brown, & McLaurin, 2009). Both the extent of damage to the brain and the complexity of the characteristic abnormal brain composition lends reasoning behind the vast body of literature and research that exists on Alzheimer's Disease.

Recent endeavors in the field of pathophysiological research in biology have been investigating the possibility of an Alzheimer's vaccine. As the research implies, the vaccine would prevent, slow the progress, and even possibly reverse the damage of Alzheimer's Disease via a pathway utilizing an immune response, essentially treating the disease with the ultimate goal of eliminating the acquiring of the disease altogether (Foster et al., 2008). While significant and substantial research has been ongoing for approximately a decade now, the sheer complexity of the disease and its implications for the cognitive and physiological functioning of the individual have presented as incredibly time-consuming and extensive studies (Kayed & Jackson, 2009). Research, however, has shown strong promise for the future in regards to public availability of a proposed Alzheimer's vaccine. Many Phase I and Phase II clinical trials on the various different vaccination pathways being studied have been completed, and some Phase III trials are cur

rently underway, showing just how far research into the vaccine has come in the years since the possibility was proposed (Matsuda, Kamina, & Nozaki, 2009). What is interesting about the vaccine research being done pertaining to AD is the variety of different biophysiological pathways that are showing success in preliminary studies. This implies that there may not be just one possibility for a vaccine to prevent or reverse the damage of Alzheimer's, in fact, there are many possible options that are being reserved thoroughly in order to ascertain which biological pathway and immune response creates the desired effect most efficiently, successfully, and above all, safely.

The Alzheimer's vaccine seeks to target the pathophysiological characteristics seen in the Alzheimer's damaged brain. Research into a possible vaccine pathway is centered around the two major characteristics of the disease on the brain: the beta-amyloid plaques and the neurofibrillary tangles (Kayed & Jackson, 2009). The majority of research has been focused on the beta-amyloid plaques, specifically, the removal or breakdown of the plaques, both soluble and insoluble, or aggregated, plaques (Foster et al., 2008). The reason that beta-amyloid plaque removal is the focus of most research, as opposed to the repairing of neurofibrillary tangles of tau protein, is due to the amyloid hypothesis of AD (Foster et al., 2008). This hypothesis states that it is the plaques that are the cause of the disastrous cognitive decline and impairment in those with Alzheimer's Disease (Foster et al., 2008). This implies that if the plaques are destroyed and removed, the brain can then return to a state of normal functioning though healing itself, and it is hopeful that cognitive abilities would then be returned to the individual. Only recently have alternative approaches to the beta-amyloid vaccine been looked at, which seek to investigate the possibility of targeting tau, the protein that is responsible for creating neurofibrillary tangles (Kayed & Jackson, 2009). Early research with tau also represents promising input to the future of an Alzheimer's vaccine, but much more research has to be done with this pathological characteristic of Alzheimer's than does that on beta-amyloid plaque removal (Kayed & Jackson, 2009).

The vast majority of research has been centered on the removal of beta-amyloid plaques from the brain, in hopes that it will facilitate reversing of the cognitive deficits experienced by the patient via the brain naturally healing itself to function properly without the obstruction of the plaques. Though many different types of beta-amyloid vaccine pathways are being researched and studied in clinical

trials, all have the same basic biological goal: stimulating an immune response to produce antibodies towards the beta-amyloid peptide which in turn prevents the further accumulation and aggregation of beta-amyloid into plaques and also breaks down the current plaques by the antibodies binding directly to the beta-amyloid (DaSilva et al., 2009). A few of the ways this method is being utilized in the beta-amyloid specific Alzheimer's vaccine is through passive immunization, active immunization, with and without different adjuvants (adjuvants act in much the same way for vaccines as catalysts do for enzymes; they aid the reaction in overall production of antibodies without causing an immune response themselves), and through DNA that encodes for the beta-amyloid peptide. Not only does each different method of breaking down the plaques have to be studied thoroughly with many accurate replications of the study, but additionally the methods have to be compared to each other to see which technique offers the fewest side effects, most effective and efficient treatment, and most reliable and safest results.

The immunization technique of being active or passive refers to how the antibodies in the body are produced. In active immunotherapy, the focus is to get the body to produce its own antibodies against beta-amyloid, while in passive immunotherapy the antibodies are already prepared and are injected into the AD patient (Foster et al., 2008). As was already mentioned, the idea behind this method of immunization for the AD vaccine is that the beta-amyloid antibodies would bind to the beta-amyloid peptide and thus inhibit the further deposition of plaques and, additionally, breakdown the current plaques, both soluble and insoluble. This would hopefully halt further progression of the disease, and even return cognitive functioning. This type of immunization was utilized in one of the largest, most well-known, and earliest clinical trials of a beta-amyloid vaccine therapy (Foster et al., 2008). The 2000 study termed AN1792 was a phase I trial that took place in the UK; the initial results were very promising and represented early success with vaccine possibilities for AD (Foster et al., 2008). However, the clinical trials came to an abrupt halt when meningoencephalitis came up as a side effect of treatment (Zhang et al., 2009). This serious central nervous system inflammation was seen in 6% of the patients in the study, a total of 18 people (Foster et al., 2008). The impact of AN1792 on AD vaccine research stressed the importance of clinical trials first on mice, then on primates, then on humans.

A study by Zhang et al. introduced intramembranous fragments of beta-amyloid peptide with an adjuvant into mice in order to immu-

munize them (2009). The potent adjuvant used was monophosphoryl lipid A/trehalose dicorynomycolate, or MPL + TDM, also known as Freund's adjuvant (Matsuda et al., 2009). The effects that were seen included moderate IgG antibody production against beta-amyloid and neutralization of the neurotoxicity by the anti-sera (Zhang et al., 2009). Their work showed that intramembranous fragments of beta-amyloid do produce an immune response of antibody production and thus may be a possibility for use in an AD vaccine. However, this takes into consideration the fact that AN1792 used a potent adjuvant in its clinical trials, which has since then been established as one of the contributing causes of the induced meningoencephalitis seen in the patients (Matsuda et al., 2009).

Since use of an adjuvant in the beta-amyloid vaccines is not always optimal, because of the possible adverse side-effects previously explained, research has also been conducted to study the effectiveness of a beta-amyloid vaccine without an adjuvant. Matsuda et al. found that addition of a cysteine amino acid residue to the C terminus of the beta-amyloid peptide without an adjuvant increased the production of anti- beta-amyloid antibodies in AD model mice by several hundred times more than the peptide did without the additional cysteine residue (2009). Furthermore, this powerful increase in immune response was not seen with the addition of any other amino acid residue other than cysteine (Matsuda et al., 2009). An interesting aspect to the study also found that enhancement of the antibody production immune response was seen only with beta-amyloid peptides of certain lengths, specifically the longer chain peptides (Matsuda et al., 2009). These findings show that an adjuvant is not necessary for the effectiveness of the possible AD vaccine; other biological substances can increase the production of antibodies without the risk of dangerous side-effects.

Research on a vaccine that employs DNA encoding for beta-amyloid antibody production also shows the possibility for an effective AD vaccine without the use of an adjuvant (DaSilva et al., 2009). Plasmids that encoded for beta-amyloid provoked an immune response that produced anti beta-amyloid antibodies in mice, which decreased the degree of plaques by an average of 36%, insoluble plaques included (DaSilva et al., 2009). As can be understood from the many methods of vaccine research previously explained, the possibility for an AD vaccine may take the appearance of any one of these effective techniques for producing antibodies against beta-amyloid. Further research must replicate these studies with similar results again on mice, then take the

studies to a level that can be more easily transferable to humans: primates. Future studies on these thus far effective methods of producing beta-amyloid antibodies would take the research one step closer to achieving a safe and effective vaccine for humans for reducing the beta-amyloid plaques in Alzheimer's patients.

While research has shown overwhelmingly consistent results of the various vaccine mechanisms being studied all showing results of producing antibodies and furthermore of clearing and breaking down beta-amyloid plaques, there are major related issues that are surfacing as significant concerns (Foster et al., 2008). The issues include neurotoxicity due to the breakdown of beta-amyloid plaques, which can accumulate to cause inflammation and swelling of the brain, hemorrhaging, and the fact that it has not yet been established whether breaking down and clearing the plaques will even result in improvement in the cognitive abilities of the Alzheimer's patient: the ultimate goal of the vaccine research (Foster et al., 2008). It is hopeful that with the successful attainment of a vaccine that clears the beta-amyloid plaques from the brain, which allows for the brain to be more comparable to that of a healthy brain as the abnormal plaques disappear, that it will then be obvious whether the beta-amyloid plaques are a source of the brain damage and cognitive impairment or rather have no significant effect on the symptoms accrued by the Alzheimer's patient.

Alzheimer's Disease is arguably one of the most devastating diseases for society, simply because of the widespread and intense impact it has on the loved ones of the person who is afflicted. In the United States alone, those who are burdened by the emotional pain of caring for a loved one with Alzheimer's Disease is estimated at 4.5 million people (Foster et al., 2008). Watching a loved one slowly decline in mental ability and overall functioning as a person, in accordance with the progressive, worsening dementia that is AD, is almost unbearable for some. Loved ones must watch as the person they knew disappears; the Alzheimer-sufferer loses the ability to remember people, events, experiences, where they live, how to feed and bathe themselves, and basic personal grooming skills, which are just a few of the many unfortunate physiological and mental consequences of the disease. Those with AD in advanced stages are left utterly helpless and unaware of the world around them, essentially disengaged with the grasp on reality they once had. This is exactly why the finding of a successful Alzheimer's vaccine would have a tremendous impact on society. By slowing the progression of the disease, reversing the damage on the brain,

and preventing the acquiring of the disease altogether, the vaccine would relieve people of the disastrous fate that Alzheimer's Disease has on a person, and by effect, their loved ones. Even preventing the furthering of damage to the brain in the form of beta amyloid plaques would mean that AD sufferers would not progress to the advanced stages of Alzheimer's in which they hold very few physiological functions and almost no cognitive or mental abilities. The vaccine would represent a culmination of an achievement at large for science and society together; relieving society and the people themselves from the pain and suffering of Alzheimer's Disease through biological research that produced a mechanism to stop the destruction of the brain that is the source of the suffering itself.

The future of the Alzheimer's Disease vaccine is not entirely certain yet, despite the volumes of promising research. Though it has been proven in many clinical trials that beta-amyloid plaques can be broken down via an antibody-inducing vaccine, it is not clear whether this alone is enough to prevent the further progression of the disease, return of cognitive abilities, or prevention of the disease altogether (DaSilva et al., 2009; Foster et al., 2008). By determining whether the removal of beta-amyloid plaques in the brain via the proposed vaccine results in an improvement in cognitive faculties, research can see if the degenerative mental functioning of a person with AD is due to the presence of the plaques. If removal of the plaques does not result in return of cognitive abilities, it is likely that research will shift to targeting neurofibrillary tangles from tau protein to determine if repairing this pathological distinction of Alzheimer's will result in prevention of further damage, and even regaining of cognitive abilities. Long-term studies are key to the success of the possible vaccine, whichever mechanism or pathway it may take on. Time, however, is a factor that is not only of the utmost importance for the overall safety and effectiveness of a vaccine against AD, but also the first to be compromised when there is the looming pressure to come out with the answer as fast as possible to prevent the further affliction of this devastating disease on more people. Researchers are hopeful that the more that is learned from continuing studies of vaccine possibilities and long-term analysis of the effects of breaking down amyloid plaques, the greater the possibility that an Alzheimer's Disease vaccine will exist one day.

References

- DaSilva, K.A., Brown, M.E., & McLaurin, J. (2009). Reduced algometric and vascular amyloid- β following immunization of TgCRND8 mice with an Alzheimer's DNA vaccine. *Vaccine*, 27 (9), 1365-1376.
- Foster, J.K., Verdile, G., Bates, K.A., & Martins, R.N. (2008). Immunization in Alzheimer's disease: Naïve hope or realistic clinical potential? *Molecular Psychiatry*, 14, 239-251.
- Kayed, R., & Jackson, G.R. (2009). Prefilament tau species as potential targets for immunotherapy for Alzheimer's disease and related disorders. *Current Opinion in Immunology*, 21 (3), 359-363.
- Matsuda, J., Kaminaka, K., & Nozaki, C. (2009). Amyloid β peptides with an additional cysteine residue can enhance immunogenic and reduce amyloid β burden in an Alzheimer's disease mouse model. *Biochemical and Biophysical Research Communication*, 382 (1), 149-152.

Swartzberg, J.E., & Margen, S. (2001). *The complete home wellness handbook*. New York, NY: Rebus, Inc.

Zhang, S., Wu, L., Liu, F., Huang, B., Huang, D., Yang, L., & Peng, Z. (2009). Intramembranous fragment of Amyloid- β : A potential immunogenic for Alzheimer's disease immunotherapy. *Neurochemical Research*, 34 (11), 1889-1895.

Poetry

Amadeo Madrid
Karen Thompson
Karen Thompson

Twilight's Last Burn

Last night I fell off the edge

And I slammed into morning

The day would soon begin

If the sun would get off my back

Scorching the skin you scream

Until my bones are freshly peeled from your words

The can see through the keyhole!

Open the door! I need to get through!

Breaking the lock off your heart

To only try to get inside

It seems that the owl's feather never was really true

It's flown its last flight

And died as it disappeared in the night

No longer will I be a slave to your twilight

Not until the moon excites me

And I see your face in its craters

Now it's crumbled to the beginning of the day

Let us finish these written ashes and store them in twilight's urn

And never, ever, remember the burns

That were left from your mouth

Ad Infinitum

You can't go back;

It never stops.

It's constant

And unending.

You can't jump forward

Just stuck in the now.

There's never enough;

And sometimes too much.

It hurts

And it's a healer.

It's Father

And it's ageless.

Blossom

Crevices in the walls,

By a multitude of bullets.

Broken glass and shards of inheritance;

Shattered lives and memories lost.

Smoke looming;

Awaiting the next spray of metal.

The sun peeks through.

The dust settles, green appears;

Life

Begins to show its face.

Fiction

Jonathon Meyers

Deeb Browne

David Mak

Roll Call

The morning air was warm and dry. The summer sun was beating down hard on all of us as we waited for our company bus to pick us up. It was 8:30 in the morning and we had to be at the chapel by 9:00 A.M. for the ceremony.

It had only been three days since we were attacked by indirect rocket fire and two days since we loaded a fellow comrade of ours onto a C-127. He would be going home in a metal box, covered by a flag. He will fly alone on this plane, accompanied only by the crew of the aircraft and no one else.

As we wait for the bus, a chill runs down my back. When I look in the faces of my comrades, I see looks of disbelief, and I know they see the same in mine. There is a blanket of hopelessness and futility that envelops us. It is heavy and it is difficult to breathe.

The night we were attacked had shattered our beliefs to the bone. We thought we were in a safe place, far away from the enemy. The camp had an almost "Disney Land" festive atmosphere in that we had all the amenities: a large shopping center, food courts, coffee shops and a gathering place where military and civilians could meet and have good times. Imagine that, Disney Land in the middle of a desert. It was our reward for fighting in combat and we made the most of it.

We only had three days left until we would move to a transfer area; from there, we would finally be leaving Iraq and coming home. We were all scrambling to pack our belongings and put packages together that we were sending home so we would not have to carry them on the plane.

The night we were attacked started out as being no different than others. A few of my comrades and I had been playing poker nightly, and we arrived at the room we normally played in. But on this night, we could not decide if we wanted to play or not. We hung around outside the room for a while, waiting for more players to show up. After a while we started to become loud and boisterous and were commiserating on how rough our lives were back home. All of a sudden we heard a loud voice from inside the room. "You guys need to shut-up for a minute!" We turned away from the room and started to laugh. We were just a bunch of guys having a carefree time.

After a while, we decided it would be best not to play as we would be busy the next morning moving our things to a new living area. We decided to call it a night and we began walking from the building to

our own rooms. The sun had set and it was getting dark.

“BOOM!”

We stopped in our tracks and turned around. We knew exactly what that sound was—and it was close.

“BOOM!”

This time I dropped to the ground. The impact felt so close that I could feel the heat and the shock wave of the blast. As I looked up, I could see sparks flying everywhere. There was a roaring fire. I stood up brushing the sand off me and placed my fingers in my ears, trying to stop the ringing. Then I heard it--a slight moan. And after that....

“MEDIC! MEDIC!”

I heard a piercing scream coming from the room that we had just left. We ran toward the room. My stomach began to churn. I looked around in disbelief. The room was almost obliterated. I looked around and saw one guy standing with blood on his leg.

“Help Anderson!” he shouted.

We all looked around for Anderson and found him lying on the floor face down. Our training took over and we began treating him before the medics arrived. The medics came. They stabilized him and prepared him for transport.

“You’re going to be alright, Anderson!” I said as well as many others as they took him away.

But it wasn’t true at all. The next morning we had a farewell ceremony for him. We were sending his remains home to his family.

That Sunday, we held a memorial ceremony for Anderson. Many people from the higher command attended. And even though they tried to be stoic, we saw that they, too, felt the grief of a lost comrade.

Anderson wasn’t with us anymore, and we knew that. However, we did not want to accept it. Many of us had spent lots of time joking with him and, on occasion, arguing with him. But we were all a team. We missed him. And now all that was left was two boots, a rifle, a helmet, and his dog tags next to a picture of him. This was all that was left.

“Company, attention,” our First Sergeant called out.

We all stood straight. We fought hard to hold back our tears. I looked at the First Sergeant. This was his first time being in command of a whole company while being deployed. To us, he was the father figure of our company. He was our role model. I wanted to be like him. I saw tears beginning to form in his eyes, and I could see that he was

using all his strength to hold them back. He was strong. He did not cry. He stood in front of us, looking straight ahead, readying to make a roll call.

“Sergeant Billing!” he yelled.

“Here, First Sergeant!”

“Specialist Cunningham!”

“Here, First Sergeant!”

“Sergeant Livengood!”

“Here, First Sergeant!”

“Specialist Anderson!”

There was no sound. Everyone stood and waited. All of us held our breath, hoping that we were going to hear his voice call out and say he was here.

“Specialist Paul Anderson!” he yelled again. But, again there was no answer.

“Specialist Paul Eugene Anderson!” he called out again.

But again there was no reply. He wasn’t there. He was not standing with us, not by me or anyone else in the company.

Seven rifles shot off three rounds. It was a twenty-one gun salute, a sign to show us that he was no longer with us. At that moment we looked at the First Sergeant. We saw a tear roll down our First Sergeant’s cheek. And while waiting to be dismissed, all of our cheeks became wet with tears.

“Dismissed,” he said in a soft tone.

There were no words spoken as we began to walk back to our tents. There was only silence—unusual for us group of guys who were always loud and care free. But the realization had finally come to us. We would be leaving with one less person. One less friend. One empty seat on the flight home. We were a Band of Brothers, going home with one less brother. We would all never be the same.

A Touch of Time

This is the end of my life.

As I sit here in this old worn-out, plaid chair, I wait for Nurse Ratchet (Millie Ames) and The Shaman (Dr. Shamaninski) to come for their visit (she always says that, you know, they are “visiting”). I look out the stained window on a cold, white, snow laden world. The days, like my own, are so very short now. Everything has gone old and gray and wilted with time. People are so akin to nature. They never realize how disturbing and yet so fantastic each moment is. The new is embraced; the old is forgotten. People are like the seasons to one another. In springtime, we all feel the excitement of rebirth, we all rejoice in praise and a feeling of freedom. Spring is our childhood. It is when our dreams are grander than any other time in our dull, everyday lives. It is when all things are possible in the universe. No laws govern our thoughts; we have pure freedom and hope. Then summer. It is made for fun, worry free, no responsibilities, no lingering guilt or concern over injustice, we simply live and love. Just like in our youthful years, we are summer. We are all happiness and warmth without scholars demanding genius of us, without schedules to keep or deadlines looming like a black shadow waiting in a cavernous alleyway, without appointments hovering, menacing overhead like the hangman’s noose, without haste or worry or fear. Then the fall comes. Ah, yes, the fall. I chuckle a little at the thought. *Fall*, the word is a creature of double meaning. In the fall of our lives, just as in the season, it is a time of change. We return to responsible duties, we worry and fret over doing the right thing, getting the good grade or promotion at work; we leave the summer-house to dusty ghosts whose footfalls can only echo our own. Yet, fall is also the beginning of our fall in life. We have reached the pinnacle. There is no way back. The clock has chimed in its quiet way with whispers of our youth hanging on the edges of our minds. We began to reference memories, saying, “My goodness, twenty years ago when so-and-so was married and Freddy broke his leg falling off his horse . . . ,” then we let our minds wander to a better time. We smile as if in a wondrous dream. Our thoughts gently roll back to the summers of our lives when everything was easy and simpler. Was it really, I wonder. Was it only in our youthful innocence that we remember an easier time? Our fall in life is not a bad season; it is not a full-blown storm. It is only another stage on which we walk. The curtain rises and we see our audience has lessened in number and strength. Some have fallen by the wayside while others have simply moved on in their own lives. We are only a sporadic memory, a mere codicil to a story. Our significance only endures as long as someone, anyone, might recall an act or word

that lent meaning, but there are so many people now, so few good acts or kind, intelligent words.

The final stage is the winter of our lives. Ha! “The Golden Years,” Nurse Ratchet calls it. She is an impudent imbecilic toady. She is no more to this world than a puff of stale smoke. How she lingers and wafts through my rooms. Just when it appears to be safe and the gagging smoke has abated, there she comes again to dampen any chance for fresh air. Her, with her breathing apparatus. “It is for your own good,” she whines. The sound of her voice grates on my nerves. Her childish, loud speech, as if I am deaf (which I assure you I am not), the nasal way she drones on about all the “older folks,” she takes care of, her incessant babbling like a brook no dam can contain – it is all too much for me. Now in the winter of my life, I wish her gone. The winter is always so gloomy. The cold wind rushes at my heart. The trees stand bareback and look to be distraught. It is all plain. Forgotten is the old world as the new world promises to shine again. The winter of our lives offers no promises. It is desolate, isolated. Just as the pin oak that once stood proudly to the right of the willow in my yard, now the willow weeps its sorrow for the mighty oak has fallen just this past week. I share the spirit of the oak tree and the sorrow of the willow. The world grows old and withered in winter much as in life. It is the law of nature, not man, which causes the oak and me to dry up and rot. Where there is life, there must be death. One dies so another might be born. We are all numbered, you know. There is a time for everyone to have chances, but if that time is wasted, it never will be gained again. No magic potion to ingest will bring back iridescent youth and time. Life only moves in one direction. The past cannot be gotten once it is lost. As with lost love, the perfect world becomes tainted, tarnished, and black. Only memories remain with a silver lining.

We all wear a number on our foreheads. That is what The Shaman tells me. Oh, he would know it, too, he, the good healer who wears a warm heart beneath his warm woolen jacket. Yes, he would certainly know. We have spent time pondering the great unknown these past few weeks. He often looks sad. I think he knows just as I do that the time of darkness is nearing. He knows without saying, but I have not, nor will I ever again, swallow one of those nasty pills Nurse Ratchet attempts to shove down my throat. Nor will I ever again have to endure one of those steam tubes that smells like menthol chest rub. She is not so smart, that one. The pills roll under my tongue nicely. She makes me open my mouth to see if they went down the pipe, but I keep them

hidden. When she turns her back, I spit them in my hanky and tuck that in my night coat. The Shaman saw me once three weeks ago. With my eyes, I implored him to secrecy. He nodded and winked so I knew I was safe.

Two weeks ago, he came by himself to see me. We talked for hours. He asked the oddest questions at first. He wanted to know if I had family, someone he should call who might like to visit. "Perhaps a friend you would like to talk to? Maybe a relative or someone from the church of your liking, eh? Some person with whom you may speak heartfelt, no?" he asked me. I told him there is no one. Any friends I once held dear have long passed away, any family who is left would not even know me now, those who would have perished. "As for church," I said, "there is no affiliation." He looked concerned and patted my hand then. That was when he told me we all wear a number on our foreheads. The Shaman spoke softly, conspiratorially to me.

"You must believe when I tell you, it is not bad, the number. It is the way. We live as the seasons live, but as the seasons return, life returns. It is a circle. The number is only seen to the One," he said.

He began to ask of my life, what I did, was I married, where I had lived, did I have love and happiness in my time, and so on. He seemed so interested. No one had been interested in such a long while that I blushed a bit from feeling flattered. I told him of a glorious life filled with adventure and happiness, and yes, once I had love.

"Tell of him, your love," The Shaman said.

"I was a young, spirited, bold girl. In those days, women were not thought of as adventurers, but I was so unlike the rest. The wind was always at my back. It was never meant that I stay in one place. Yes, I traveled extensively across Europe, Africa, and back to the United States. Here in the States is where I met him. He was beautiful: Tall, cocoa skin, green eyes, soft spoken, and the kindest heart. The kindest heart the world ever had known. We spent the summer at his home on the East Coast. He painted. He was a marvelous painter. Oh, my dear, his painting were breathtaking -- the colors, the shadowing, the detail! It was all so brilliant. We spent days on end roaming the village, combing the beaches. Once we took a boat out on the water. The captain was a simple, but thoughtful man. He was the one who told us what the local people were saying."

I had to stop. Just the thought of those days pained me. The Shaman held my hand and asked me to go on.

“I will, but only for you so you will know the truth of my life. A life should not be forgotten, though I know no one will remember me,” I told him.

“I shall always remember you. You must finish your story. By telling someone a small story of your life, part of that life stays alive,” he said.

“The people of the village were all gossiping. No one had ever seen a white girl go with a man of color . . . any color but white, that is. Jontau was well thought of in the area, until he met me. Everyone liked him and they all thought he was set to go with this other girl, a Jamaican, I think. Then he met me. I would have married him, and he wanted us to marry. He even would move to where we were accepted as a couple, which was how he put it.”

I began to weep at the thought of what I lost when I left Jontau. The Shaman stroked my back and asked whatever became of Jontau. As I gathered my composure, thanking him for his kindness and interest in an old woman’s memories, I realized I did not know what had become of Jontau.

“I suppose he married the pretty Jamaican girl and they had a happy life,” I answered.

Today I sit looking out of the dirty stained window waiting for Nurse Ratchet and The Shaman to arrive. There is a small black car coming up the driveway. It is Dr. Shamaninski. How nice of him to come by. There is not a thing he can do for me now. The winter is ending soon. Still, he comes. He tells me Nurse Ratchet is not with him and she no longer will stop by. I like how he says, “Stop by,” as if she were stopping over for tea and crumpets, and not coming to torture me. He says she will not bother me again. The Shaman checks my heart, tells me to breathe deeply, then sits down near me.

“I am working at something for you,” he says. His eyes sparkle as he smiles broadly.

“What might that be? You know there is no time like the present at this stage of life,” I tell him.

“If it all works out, you will be most pleased for sure,” he says. “I shall check back with you tomorrow, if you do not mind it. Perhaps I will have some news of the good kind to brighten your heart.”

“Oh, I would like that. You are always welcome in my home,” I told him.

Not long after The Shaman leaves, I grow weary. I wish the pin oak could have lived longer. It was my favorite of the trees in the yard.

As the sun broke through the clouds, the two men stood quietly at the graveside.

“You know, she still loved you. I am so sorry I was too late in finding you,” Dr. Shamaninski said, to the tall, dark man next to him.

“I wish I could have found her after she left, but for all my efforts to search for her, I never stopped thinking of her. I never married. She was the kindest heart the world had ever known,” Jontau said.

The men stood a moment more. They both wept.

Crispix and Glasses

“So, where would you like to go for lunch afterward?” asked my grandfather from the front passenger seat of my sister’s car.

“I don’t know, Grandpa,” said Lauren loudly. “What do you have here in town? Anything good?”

“There was that small diner on Watson Avenue that you liked when you were younger,” replied Grandpa, slowly.

“Or, there was that gift card you got from the church for Cracker Barrel,” my sister suggested. “We could use that. Do you like their food, Grandpa?”

Sitting in the backseat, I began to take in my surroundings. Anything to avoid the awkward small talk of my sister and Grandpa. At my feet laid half a dozen empty cans of Amp energy drink, with just as many crumpled boxes of Marlboro 100’s on the seat beside me. The ’96 Caprice held onto the pungent odor of cigarette smoke. The powerful stench attacked my nostrils with every breath. Years’ worth of ash and vapors had slowly embedded themselves into the charcoal colored upholstery.

Outside, the beautiful scenery of southern Michigan unfolded. It had been ten years since I had seen St. Joseph. Driving through the town flooded my mind with memories. Everything I saw took me back to those days. The unusually beautiful hospital with large, stained glass windows. A street sign which read “Elmo Blvd.” that always made me laugh for some unknown reason. A snow laden park, I hadn’t seen in years. I think *he* had taken me there to play catch once....

Without warning, I felt a hot feeling in my face. I couldn’t hear anything. My world began to spin as the torrent of emotion I had been avoiding for three days began to rush at me like a battering ram, beating into me until I explo..., *NO!*, I thought. I couldn’t allow myself to be overcome. Not there, not then. It was still too much for me to face.

Lauren brought the car to an abrupt halt. I glanced out the window to see that we had arrived at our destination. I quickly unbuckled my seatbelt and retreated from the malodorous vehicle. My lungs objected to the icy January air, but my mind found it soothing. The large, sand-tinted, brick building stood before me, the snow neatly plowed from the doorstep.

“Are you ready for this, Alex?” Lauren asked me as she rose from the car.

“I think so,” I lied. “You?”

“I’ll be alright. Let’s just get through this and be done with it.” Lauren’s animosity reared its ugly head. I didn’t blame her at all for her anger. “Are you ready, Grandpa?” she asked, almost at a shout to compensate for his failing sense of hearing.

My grandfather stood from his seat and spoke slowly. “Oh, yes. We’re a little early, but it shouldn’t be an issue.”

I turned toward the building and felt that familiar tension in my chest. The knot pulled tighter with each step I took. The automatic doors slid open soundlessly to allow us entry. The interior wasn’t unlike a small ski lounge. The faux brick construction meshed well with the roaring stone fireplace which had been surrounded by an overstuffed brown, leather seating set. Off to the left was a small office which had a stunning grandfather clock standing guard at the door. The timepiece echoed loudly throughout the foyer. From the office came a portly man who wore a mustache and a plain black, satin suit.

He reached his hand out toward my grandfather, who shook it briefly. “Hello, Mr. Martin. It’s good to meet you again,” the man said. “I’m sorry it had to be under such ill circumstances. You have my condolences.”

The funeral director then turned to my sister and me. “And you must be Lauren and Alex, Jr. You have my sympathies. I am very sorry for the loss of your father.”

“Thank you,” Lauren responded politely.

“Well,” the man began, “we still have some time before the service begins. You are free to relax here in the lounge while preparations are made. Also, we must ask that someone please make an identification before the cremation process can begin.”

The director gave a practiced, yet respectful smile and walked back into his workplace while the three of us made our way to the sofas. I settled to the left of the fire. The seat was plush and very comfortable. It gave me the feeling that funeral homes were specifically designed to distract, as if to say that a nice sofa and tall grandfather clock would help one forget their pain. *A peaceful little lie*, I thought.

As Lauren and Grandpa committed themselves to more small talk, I retreated into my memories. I had found out on Sunday, just three days earlier. I was in the process of getting ready for work when I heard the phone ring. Upstairs, I heard my mother rush to answer so I continued dressing. As I made my way out the door, she stopped me.

“Allex, that was your sister Lauren on the phone,” she paused, as if unsure of what to say. “Dad died last night. I’m so sorry Allex.” She looked genuinely sad, even though they had been divorced for most of my twenty-two years. They had separated when I was only six.

I stood there, shocked. Struck with so much at once that I couldn’t focus. I quickly told her that I had to go to work and rushed out the door. I got into my car and drove. I didn’t go to work. Later on, I would tell my boss that my car had broken down and that I couldn’t be in that day. I couldn’t form the words to tell him the real reason. I don’t specifically recall going anywhere of importance as I drove; I just knew that when I arrived back home, the gas tank was nearly empty and my knuckles were raw from beating on my steering wheel.

Four years had passed since I had spoken with him. When I graduated from high school, my father called me, like he did with ever decreasing frequency in those days. He had asked me how school had been and if I was excited to graduate. I told him I was and asked if he wanted to come to my graduation ceremony.

“Of course, Allex,” he had said. “I’ll be there. I promise.”

He never came.

I never spoke to him again, yet I was the last person to see him for who he really was. For years, I had heard the stories from family and friends alike, but I neglected to listen. Three angry children and a string of ex-wives wasn’t enough evidence for me. Even Grandpa, his own father, wanted nothing to do with him. I refused to see the truth.

My father was a cheat, a liar, and an all around appalling man. And yet, I could not hate him. From time-to-time, I would wonder how he was doing or even contemplate contacting him. I would even feel guilt after deciding not to call. After all, he was still my father.

I would eventually be told that in the years leading to his death, he began to drink heavily. This led to severe cirrhosis of the liver, which left him hospitalized. After some major complications stemming from the liver damage, he suffered the heart attack that killed him.

And so, sitting there in that overstuffed chair in the highly decorated funeral parlor, I found myself filled with conflict. Love and hate. Sadness and apathy. And fear. Fear was the worst of it all. I nearly cried, I was so afraid. And yet, there I sat, stoic and calm.

It wasn’t too long before the funeral director came back over and led us to a large oak door within the same hall as the lounge. “Now we have placed his body in the next room,” the director informed us.

“He has already been uncovered. You are free to have as much time as you would like.”

When I had initially spoken to Lauren about the service, I had little desire to attend. Even at that moment, I cared very little about the memorial. I had come for this moment.

Most of my family had at least some negative feelings toward my father; however, not one of them felt anything close to what I did. Since the last time I had spoken with him, I turned away from him in contact, but not in mind. For those past four years, I had begun to see little similarities between him and me. Like him, I had always been a gifted liar and a smooth talker. I had always been able to steer events into favorable outcomes through my words. More recently, I even found myself steering toward his preferred profession, both in my job and in my college education. The worst came when an angry ex-girlfriend told me I was just like my father, after a nasty fight. Over time, I grew to fear the possibility that I would someday become everything I hated in my father. This was a concept more terrifying than any other. Every time I saw the similarities persist, I would shudder in horror.

As the hefty director opened the door, I felt the cool breeze tickle my neck as I walked through the door. There had been no discussion, but all three of us walked in together. The funeral director closed the door gently behind us.

I couldn't tell how much time passed. There was no clock in the room. The floor was lined with soft, off-white linoleum, and the walls had been painted with a pea green hue. In the center of the room was a long, stainless steel table, upon which laid my father.

From the shoulders down, he had been covered with a sky blue sheet. His black hair had begun to grey at the side burns since I had seen him last. His mustache had also been tinted with an ashy color. His face was sunken and dark, like he had been in water for too long. The back of his head, around his ears, was blue from the collected blood. His glasses rested on the bridge of his nose.

At some point, I heard Lauren say that she had to get out of there. Then it was just Grandpa and me. Eventually, I got past the shock of seeing him and let my emotions run free. I stared down at my father and tried to get mad at him. It was fury unlike any I had ever experienced. The years of neglect and hurt feelings built in layers until it nearly overflowed. Standing there, I got so mad I nearly

punched him. But, before my anger got took hold of me like a leaf caught in the wind, I became aware of a seemingly random memory.

I couldn't have been older than five- or six-years old. It was a summer Saturday morning before my parent's divorce. The day was warm and a baseball game was on the TV. Beside me, my father ate a bowl of his favorite cereal, Crispix. We weren't doing anything special. It wasn't a particularly memorable event. However, I felt safe. As father and son, we were whole and together. We were happy. And in that moment, with him beside me with his simple pleasure, a favorite cereal, something I had no reason at all to remember, all was right in the world.

Suddenly, looking down at my father, I couldn't help but smile. It was suddenly clear to me. I saw my father for what he had become. He had pushed everyone he ever cared about away from himself. He died a solitary death. Seeing him as he was, I knew that I wouldn't follow his path because, in that moment, I saw where it ended. Cold and alone.

I then became aware that my grandfather's hand rested on my shoulder. I faced him to see that he too was smiling. It wasn't a malicious happiness we shared; rather, it was a sign of love, to be genuinely happy to see him one last time. With that, we departed from the small room together.

Shortly thereafter, a priest arrived and held a short service. Fewer than twenty people attended. Dad was not present. It was a typical service in which the priest discussed the quality of the man being laid to rest. Most of the congregation was pleased. Grandpa, Lauren, and I just looked down at the ground and allowed everyone else to accept the fallacy.

After the memorial, I waited around outside the hall as well-wishers offered their condolences. Most were sincere and pleasant. Among the last was the heavysset funeral director. He approached me with a small, black case in his left hand.

"Son, I have here your father's glasses. I was wondering if you would like to keep them as a memento," he said softly as he held out the container.

I felt the words catch in my throat and eventually I forced out a quiet "Thank you." We shook hands and he went on to speak with my sister.

I took the case in both hands, pinched the top between my

thumb and forefinger, and pulled. The lid gently slid open, and inside were his glasses. The only thing I had left of my father, my enemy, my missing wonder, and my greatest fear. But, once again, all I could do was smile. I closed the case and slid it into my breast pocket.

As the day came to a close, it came time to leave. As Lauren helped Grandpa out to her car to go out for lunch, I stayed back for a moment to say my last goodbyes. However, as I found myself gravitating toward the exit, I felt drawn, as if I wasn't done yet. I turned away from the exit door and peered into the empty lounge area. I thought about my fears again as I considered what had come to me. I realized that I would never be able to move on until I told him how I felt. I was still fearful of my potential fate, but I finally felt able to take the first step away from it. *I forgive you, Dad*, I thought. *Now please, stay dead.*

As I made my way back to Lauren's Caprice, I thought back to that room again. I realized that there was no longer any point to hating him, and that it was alright to love him. It was okay to mourn. It was okay to forget the bad and focus on the good. Even if the bad was an unending list of hurt, and the good was something as small as Crispix and glasses, I chose to hold onto that. It was time to let go. I smiled one more time as I ducked into the backseat of my sister's car.

Robert Braddy

In the spring of 2010, Robert Braddy will complete his sophomore year at Purdue North Central. He will earn his Associates of Science in Business degree after this summer session. His classes at Purdue North Central have set a firm foundation for him as he transfers to main campus of Purdue University in the fall to finish his last two years of college. In his spare time, Robert is a treasurer intern at the First United Methodist Church. Robert also competed in a 120 mile canoe race in this past summer with the Venture Crew. Robert was surprised when his English 102 teacher asked him to enter this contest and is honored to have received an award.

Deeb Browne

Deeb lives in LaPorte, Indiana, on a small horse ranch. She is a junior at PNC, majoring in English, and will graduate in 2011 with a Bachelor of Arts in English. After she receives her degree, Deeb plans on attending Valparaiso University, in pursuit of a Master of Arts in English, before moving back to Arizona. A non-traditional student, Deeb is a 2002 graduate of Ancilla College, and from 2001-2003 worked for The *Walkerton Herald* newspaper. From 2001-2002, she was a correspondent for the *South Bend Tribune*. In the 1999 August issue of *Western Horseman*, Deeb's article, "Women in Rodeo," was published. Deeb's favorite past-times are riding and writing. She also loves camping, hiking, and just about any outdoor activity that excludes snow. Deeb has four horses, five cats, one dog, and one fiancé.

Ethan Davis

Ethan Davis is a freshman at PNC and is undecided in his major thus far. He was born and raised in Michigan City, Indiana and graduated from Michigan City High School in 2009. Ethan enjoys writing, design, and history and is looking to major in one of these fields.

Cynthia DeSantiago

Cynthia, a second year student who is currently studying at PNC to become a nurse, has been branching out into new areas of art. She has studied many styles but mainly stays with either pencil or ink on simple paper. Cynthia, whose inspirations for her art are her family, friends, home, and experiences, puts her spirit into all her pieces of art for other people to see.

Jennifer Evan

Jennifer Evan will be graduating, with a Bachelors of Liberal Studies degree (Pre-Medicine concentration), at the age of 20 in 2011. Her interests include painting landscapes and still lifes, learning languages, and traveling. She hopes to attend medical school to study neuroscience and physiology.

Lakiska Flippin

Lakiska Flippin is currently completing her prerequisites for entry into medical school; she plans to matriculate after the Fall 2011 semester. She submitted her essay because, considering aspartame's widespread use, she believes that people need be informed of its potential dangers. This semester, Lakiska has been conducting research as part of the Louis Stokes Alliance Minority Program, and she presented her results on April 16 at a research conference that was held at Butler University. She has been a member of a belly-dance troupe and has completed two marathons. During her five minutes of free time every week, she likes to make silly jokes with her fiancé, Paul, or to take naps with her doggies.

Dan Fortney

Dan is a homeschooled high school junior who has been taking dual credit classes at PNC for two years now. He enjoys mathematics, has recently taken an interest in computer programming, and uses his spare time to work on a series of fantasy novels, which he hopes to someday publish. In addition, Dan has written several poems, two of which have seen publication.

Laura Gertzen

Laura is a Sophomore who recently transferred to IUN and is working toward her K-12 Visual Arts degree. Laura has a family of eight and a full time job as an administrator for an environmental consulting firm. Laura writes, "Life is full and wonderful. I sometimes try to capture those fleeting moments of beauty as they whiz by on film. Occasionally, I'm lucky and they turn out pretty cool."

Thomas Kuehl

Tom Kuehl, a junior at PNC, is majoring in Mechanical Engineering Technology and is the President of the PNC Rotaract Club. In 2008, he won first place for his personal narrative essay, "Stand Out and Be Counted." Before coming to Purdue, Tom served in the US Navy for seventeen years and is now a disabled veteran. He has been married for eighteen years to his wonderful wife, Sandi, and is a proud parent of five children. Tom has recently become a very proud grandfather.

Amadeo Madrid

Amedeo does not consider himself a poet. He considers himself a writer. Amadeo is nineteen-years old and is attending PNC for unknown reasons. His influences in writing are his father, Bob Dylan, and strange occurrences at various moments in time. The poems that he writes have no particular meaning other than inspiration. He hopes to enter more of his work during his tenure at PNC.

David Mak

David Mak is a junior at PNC . He is a student in the College of Business, where he focuses in Management and Economics. David was born and raised in Michigan City, Indiana. He has always been interested in storytelling and, in his youth, experimented with filmmaking; however, it was only recently, after taking a course in creative writing, that he became interested in writing. He hopes that someday he might become an accomplished writer and get the countless stories in his head published.

Jonathon Meyers

Jonathon M. Meyers, who is a sophomore at PNC working towards a Minor in Marketing and a BLS degree (English Concentration), hopes to teach overseas and write for as long as he is capable and imagination can run free.

Tom Potter

Tom Potter is an English Education major and is working toward his Bachelor of Science degree in Secondary Education. He lives in Chesterton, Indiana, where he enjoys spending time with family and friends. Tom works at the Brassie Golf Course and volunteers with community projects, such as Rebuilding Together Duneland. His favorite essayist is David Sedaris.

Mark Strudas

Mark was born in Valparaiso, IN but grew up in Chesterton, IN, where he attended grade school at St. Patrick's. He attended Chesterton High School, where he graduated as a member of the Technology Honors Society for Industrial Mechanics. He enlisted in the United States Marine Corps in March, 2003 and entered active duty in August of that year. Mark served two tours in Al Taqaddum, Iraq. He reached the rank of Corporal and earned many citations before separation. Mark is a Business Management Major at PNC.

Karen Thompson

Karen Thompson is a senior at PNC who is working toward her Bachelor of Arts in English, which she will receive in May, 2010. She has been working in the PNC Writing Center for three years and has been the student director for two of those years. She is married to a wonderful man, Josh, and has a five-year old son, Liam. Karen enjoys reading and writing in her spare time. She hopes to pursue a career in writing novels after graduation.

Writing and Art Contest Winners—2009-2010

Category One: Personal Essay

“The Super Bowl,” by Ethan Davis (1st)

“Waiting,” by Tom Potter (2nd)

“Some Fought for Each Other,” by Mark Strudas (3rd)

Category Two: English Composition Research Essay

“Voluntuition,” by Thomas Kuehl (1st)

“The Great Debate: The Pros and Cons of Guns in the Classroom,” by Robert Braddy (2nd)

“Unsure of Uniforms: Are Assumed Effects Merely Hearsay?,” by Jennifer Evan (3rd)¹

“A Study of Single-Gender Classrooms,” by Dan Fortney (4th)

Category Three: Campus-Wide Research Essay

“Alzheimer's Disease in Society: Research Efforts Investigate a Cure Through Immunotherapy,” by Jennifer Evan (1st)²

“Aspartame in the Membrane,” by Lakiska Flippin (2nd)

Category Four: Poetry

“Blossom,” by Karen Thompson (1st)

“*Ad Infinitum*,” by Karen Thompson (2nd)

“Twilight's Last Burn,” by Amadeo Madrid (3rd)

Category Five: Short Fiction

“Crispix and Glasses,” by David Mak (1st --tie)

“A Touch of Time,” by Deeb Browne (1st --tie)

“Roll Call,” by Jonathon Meyers (3rd)

Art Contest

“My Home,” Cynthia de Santiago (1st)

“Midsummer Sunlight at the Dunes,” Laura Gertzen (2nd)

¹Diversity Award

²Best Overall Essay Award

PS
501
P67x
2010

DEMCO

PURDUE

UNIVERSITY

NORTH CENTRAL